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Richard Wagner's *Jesus von Nazareth*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at
Virginia Commonwealth University

by

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τῇ Καλλίστῃ:

ὁ ἔρωσ ἡμῶν ἦν ἀληθινός.

“Jede Trennung giebt einen Vorschmack des Todes,
— und jedes Wiedersehn einen Vorschmack der Auferstehung.”

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Abstract

RICHARD WAGNER'S *JESUS VON NAZARETH*.

By Matthew J. Giessel, M.A.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2013.

Director: Joseph Bendersky, Ph.D., Professor, Department of History.

In addition to his renowned musical output, Richard Wagner produced a logorrhoeic prose oeuvre, including a dramatic sketch of the last weeks of the life of Jesus Christ entitled *Jesus von Nazareth*. Though drafted in 1848-1849, it was published only posthumously, and has therefore been somewhat neglected in the otherwise voluminous Wagnerian literature. This thesis first examines the origins of *Jesus von Nazareth* amidst the climate of revolution wherein it was conceived, ascertaining its place within Wagner's own internal development and amongst the radical thinkers who influenced it. While Ludwig Feuerbach has traditionally been seen as the most prominent of these, this thesis examines Wagner's sources more broadly. The thesis then summarizes and analyzes *Jesus von Nazareth* itself, particularly in terms of Wagner's use of biblical scripture. The thesis demonstrates how his not infrequent misuse thereof constitutes one way in which Wagner transmogrifies Jesus as mutable lens through which his own ideology of social revolution is reflected. It also attempts to provide a critical assessment of the relative dramatic merits of *Jesus von Nazareth* and looks into Wagner's ultimate decision not to complete the work. The thesis then briefly summarizes the changes that occurred in Wagner's mature Christological outlook subsequent to his drafting of *Jesus von Nazareth*, attempting to concisely demonstrate some developments beyond Wagner's well-known encounter with the philosophy of

Arthur Schopenhauer. The thesis concludes with an evaluation of how *Jesus von Nazareth* informed Wagner's general religious outlook and the extent to which this worldview is a productive one.

Introduction

“κτῆμά τε ἐς αἰεὶ μᾶλλον ἢ ἀγώνισμα ἐς τὸ παραχρῆμα ἀκούειν ξύγκειται.”¹

Rarely has there been a more polarizing artistic figure than Wilhelm Richard Wagner. But despite his enduring legacy of controversy, his continued relevance has derived in part from the manner in which he composed his works, which, to paraphrase Thucydides, he intended not to garner “the applause of the moment” but instead to function as “an everlasting possession.” Though Wagner felt that his musico-dramatic output stood outside of time, and in this way somewhat solipsistically inured himself to criticism, he was nevertheless inevitably a product of his era. Wagner’s nineteenth-century Europe was a time and place in which religious dogma was increasingly questioned and in which art grew in importance to become a nigh-sacred ritual experience in its own right. Wagner was at the forefront of both of these trends, and he in fact played a large role in creating a kind of art-religion in his operas. Indeed, we find Wagner opening his 1880 essay *Religion und Kunst*² with a bold statement to this effect:

One might say that where Religion becomes artificial, it is reserved for Art to save the spirit of religion by recognising the figurative value of the mythic symbols which the former would have us believe in their literal sense, and revealing their deep and hidden truth through an ideal presentation. Whilst the priest stakes everything on the religious allegories being accepted as matters of fact, the artist has no concern at all with such a thing, since he freely and openly gives out his work as his own invention. But Religion has sunk into an artificial life, when she finds herself compelled to keep on adding to the edifice of her dogmatic symbols, and thus conceals the one divinely True in her beneath an ever growing heap of incredibilities commended to belief. Feeling this, she has always sought the aid of Art; who on her side has remained incapable of higher evolution so long as she must present that alleged reality of the symbol to the senses of the worshipper in form of fetishes and idols,— whereas she could only fulfil her true vocation when,

¹ “In fine, I have written my work, not as an essay which is to win the applause of the moment, but as a possession for all time.” (trans. Richard Crawley) Cf. “My history is an everlasting possession, not a prize composition which is heard and forgotten.” (trans. Benjamin Jowett) Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, book 1, chapter 22, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3atext%3a1999.01.0199>.

² *Religion and Art*.

by an ideal presentment of the allegoric figure, she led to apprehension of its inner kernel, the truth ineffably divine.³

Such a manifesto could have served as an explanation for Wagner's *Jesus von Nazareth*, written thirty years prior, to say nothing of encompassing the spirit of most of his artistic oeuvre in general. Though the exact timeframe of its drafting is not definitively known, *Jesus von Nazareth* was most likely written in late 1848-1849 in Dresden, when Wagner increasingly became involved with the revolutionary movement then sweeping Europe. This would personally culminate for him in his participation in the failed Dresden uprising of May 1849 and his subsequent flight into exile. Wagner's political activism, as well as his own innate and voracious intellectual curiosity, brought him into contact with multifarious contemporary thinkers and their ideas whose influence is evident in *Jesus von Nazareth*. Within this intellectual milieu, Ludwig Feuerbach has traditionally been seen as the most prominent thinker whose ideas Wagner's work reflects during this period of his life, though in fact the composer was subject to a broad array of influences. Indeed, one of this thesis' ancillary goals is to shed light on the expanded scope of Wagner's intellectual development away from the conventional emphasis primarily on the two poles of Feuerbach and Arthur Schopenhauer.

Wagner ultimately abandoned *Jesus von Nazareth* as a work in its own right and it was never finished as a complete opera.⁴ However, it has been not infrequently observed in the Wagnerian literature that *Jesus von Nazareth's* premise of the development of a religious hero

³ Richard Wagner, *Religion and Art*, in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, vol. 6, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1897), 213, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://users.belgacom.net/wagnerlibrary/prose/wlpr0126.htm>. Ashton Ellis's translation style was famously idiosyncratic, in part due to his attempts to preserve Wagner's Germanicisms, as discussed below. With this in mind, "sic" indications have been omitted throughout this thesis except where deemed absolutely necessary for clarity.

⁴ Some insignificant, unpublished musical sketches for *Jesus von Nazareth* have survived, according to Saffle. (Michael Saffle, *Richard Wagner: A Guide to Research* [New York: Routledge, 2002], 315-316.)

would ultimately serve, along with Wagner's dramatization of life of the Buddha, *Die Sieger*,⁵ as a prefiguring exercise for Wagner's ultimate completion of his final opera *Parsifal*. *Jesus von Nazareth* also functioned as means for Wagner to clarify his own approach to spirituality for himself. Despite the profound changes in his worldview that would be catalyzed by his discovery of Schopenhauer a few years later, and the eventual tempering of Wagner's activism for an outright political revolution, several of his primary concerns in *Jesus von Nazareth* – the importance of love, anti-materialism, and anti-nomianism – would remain prominent throughout his life.

But the very fact that *Jesus von Nazareth* was never completed and was only published posthumously has meant that the work has faced comparative scholarly neglect in the otherwise voluminous corpus of commentary on Wagner. This thesis seeks to redress this gap by examining both the work itself and the mode of its genesis. In the former case, it becomes readily apparent that Wagner conceives of Jesus as a sort of socialist revolutionary. In all of his operatic works, Wagner freely adapts his source material to suit his own dramatic ends, and *Jesus von Nazareth* is no exception. However, given the singular importance of the source text in question – the Bible – the thesis analyzes the nature of Wagner's departures therefrom and obfuscations thereof in some detail.

Jesus von Nazareth conclusively demonstrates Wagner's conception of a variety of Christianity which is focused on the composer's own determination of the earthly applications of the message of Jesus himself, rather than on transcendent immortality. Furthermore, the very existence of a document like *Jesus von Nazareth* is attributable to Wagner's conflation of this form of spirituality with artistic experience, and to his professed view that his own music dramas

⁵ *The Victors*.

represented one of the best means of conveying this apotheosized art. As early as 1841 Wagner had penned this quasi-liturgical liturgical *credo*:

—I believe in God, Mozart and Beethoven, and likewise their disciples and apostles;—I believe in the Holy Spirit and the truth of the one, indivisible Art;—I believe that this Art proceeds from God, and lives within the hearts of all illumined men;—I believe that he who once has bathed in the sublime delights of this high Art, is consecrate to Her for ever, and never can deny Her;—I believe that through this Art all men are saved...⁶

Thus are the bounds of belief removed from the ecclesiastical magisterium of Nicaea to the Euterpean heights of Parnassus. Wagner, of course, considered himself to be the spiritual descendant of musical saints like Beethoven.⁷ He therefore had no difficulty in conceiving of himself as the redemptive creator of salvific art, of which *Jesus von Nazareth* functions as an example unique among his works in its reappropriation of the central events of Christianity itself to Wagner's own artistic ends.

⁶ Richard Wagner, "An End in Paris," in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, vol. 7, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1898), 66-67, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://users.belgacom.net/wagnerlibrary/prose/wagendpa.htm>.

⁷ See, e.g. Wagner's 1870 *Beethoven* essay (Richard Wagner, *Beethoven*, in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, vol. 5, trans. William Ashton Ellis [London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1896], 61-126, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://users.belgacom.net/wagnerlibrary/prose/wlpr0133.htm>.)

Part I

Religion and Revolution: Historical Contextualization

“Meine Sache ist: Revolution zu machen wohin ich komme.”⁸

“My task is to create a revolution wherever I go;” so Wagner proclaimed to his friend Theodor Uhlig in an 1849 letter. Houston Stewart Chamberlain, the racial theorist who was so eager to enter the Wagner family circle that, after Wagner’s death, he courted no less than three of the composer’s daughters and step-daughters in succession, avers that “diese Worte könnten als Wagner’s Wahlspruch für sein ganzes Leben gelten.”⁹ For the Wagner of *Jesus von Nazareth*, however, revolution was not just a political upheaval; it required a “Menscheitsrevolution,” a revolution of mankind, particularly in the sphere of art.¹⁰ Given the broadness of this framework, which encompasses the entire human condition, religion is necessarily revolutionized as well. The intertwining of religion and revolution forms the intellectual background in which *Jesus von Nazareth* was conceived, and the sources that aid in its elucidation are amenable to a threefold division: the broad currents that form a deeper historical supporting structure, internal

⁸ Richard Wagner, *Richard Wagner’s Briefe an Theodor Uhlig, Wilhelm Fischer, Ferdinand Heine* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1888), letter to Uhlig of December 27, 1849, no. 5, 20, accessed November 27, 2013, <https://archive.org/details/richardwagnersb00wagn>.

⁹ “These words could be considered Wagner’s motto for his whole life.” (The genitive apostrophe is in Chamberlain’s original (as also in the title of the book in the preceding note); it was a commonplace usage in marking personal names as possessive in nineteenth-century German. Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Richard Wagner* (München: Verlagsanstalt für Kunst und Wissenschaft, 1896), 125, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=abFXAAAAMAAJ>).

¹⁰ Richard Wagner, *Die Kunst und Die Revolution*, in *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, vols. 3-4, (Leipzig: E.W. Fritsch, 1897), 29, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=TGCfAAAAMAAJ>.

correspondences to Wagner's previous and near-contemporaneous musical and written works, and the influence of contemporary intellectuals on Wagner's mentality at the time.

Chapter 1: Broad Influences

The Passion in Drama and Music

As Wagner's *Jesus von Nazareth* focuses primarily on the final part of Jesus's life, it is in some sense a Passion play, and the question of its relatedness to the Passion as a traditional dramatic and musical form naturally arises. Wagner himself does not seem to acknowledge the Passion tradition in his writings, perhaps because he thought of *Jesus von Nazareth* as existing on a higher level than the mere "retelling" of the Gospel. The Passion play had originally emerged as a expression of medieval popular piety, though it had been in decline since the Enlightenment, at which time its equivalent could be found works like Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock's *Der Messias*,¹¹ completed in 1773. Klopstock's poeticization of Christ was among the more controversial works of German literature until Wagner's own divisive oeuvre. While its treatment of Judaism is disputed,¹² commentators like Francke have seen *Der Messias*, which is "not so much an epic as a high pitched musical," as prefiguring Wagner.¹³ Klopstock's poems in

¹¹ *The Messiah*.

¹² See Wolf-Daniel Hartwich, *Romantischer Antisemitismus von Klopstock bis Wagner* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005). This is critically reviewed by Roger Paulin, who concludes, "I cannot accept Klopstock's *Der Messias* as an anti-Semitic text unless it is referred to a fuller discussion of eighteenth-century Christology than occurs here." (Roger Paulin, "Romantischer Antisemitismus von Klopstock bis Richard Wagner by Wolf-Daniel Hartwich," in *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 102, No. 1 [Jan., 2007]: 269, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20467247>.)

¹³ Kuno Francke, "Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock," in *The Warner Library*, vol. 14, ed. John W. Cunliffe and Ashley H. Thorndike (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1917), 8692-8693, accessed on November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=BQ0IAQAIAAJ>.

general are reminiscent of Wagner “in the boldness of their rhythmic effects and in their irresistible appeal to emotion.”¹⁴

The Passion play proper’s revival in the public conscious in fact tellingly coincided with the rise of Wagner’s own Bayreuth Festival in the 1870s. In the Bayreuth Festival’s quasi-religious veneration of Wagner and his works one can discern an ethos similar to the mentality present in the communitatively-shared and dramatically-distilled religious and spiritual experience of the Passion play.¹⁵ *Parsifal*, strongly influenced by *Jesus von Nazareth*, and designed specifically for the Bayreuth stage, was for many years prohibited from performance elsewhere, and in fact is grandiloquently subtitled *ein Bühnenweihfestspiel* – “a stage-

¹⁴ Ibid., 8693. A consideration of Wagner’s childhood brings to mind a play written by his stepfather Ludwig Geyer, *Der Bethlehemitische Kindermord* (*The Slaughter of the Innocents in Bethlehem*), as a possible influence on the composer’s conception of Christ. (See Ludwig Geyer, *Der Bethlehemitische Kindermord: Dramatisch-komische Situationen aus dem Künstlerleben, in zwei Aufzügen* [Weimar: Hoffmann, 1820], accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=j0ZGAAAAYAAJ>.) Despite its title, it is in fact a comedic scenario which traces the vicissitudes of an artist’s life (see Curt von Westernhagen, *Wagner: A Biography* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978], 11.), and is thus irrelevant to a consideration of *Jesus von Nazareth*, though Wagner does relate that it attained some posthumous popularity and “was praised by Goethe in a most friendly fashion.” (See Richard Wagner, *My Life*, ed. Mary Whittall, trans. Andrew Gray [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983], 4.) Wagner’s parentage is in fact unclear. His mother Johanna married Geyer after Wagner’s father Carl Friedrich Wagner died six months following his birth (Wagner attributes this in part to “nervous fever” – likely meaning typhoid fever – on the opening page of his autobiography *Mein Leben*), but Johanna and Geyer may have had an affair predating Carl Friedrich’s death. Wagner went by the surname “Geyer” until the age of fourteen, and it has been speculated (indeed, even by Wagner himself) that Geyer might have been his biological father. Geyer has controversially been alleged to have been Jewish, but there is little evidence for this (see Bryan Magee, *The Tristan Chord: Wagner and Philosophy* [New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000], 358-359); Derek Watson, *Richard Wagner: A Biography* [London: J.M. Dent, 1979], 21-22, and O. G. Sonneck, “Was Richard Wagner a Jew?,” in *Studies in Musical Education, History, and Aesthetics, Sixth Series, Papers and Proceedings of the Music Teachers’ National Association at its Thirty-Third Annual Meeting, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich., December 26-29, 1911*, Hartford, Conn.: The Music Teachers’ National Association, 1912, 250-274, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=28oJAQAAMAAL>.) This did not stop Nietzsche in *Der Fall Wagner* from arguing for Wagner’s fundamentally imitative un-Germaness, and quipping, “Sein Vater war ein Schauspieler Namens Geyer. Ein Geyer ist beinahe schon ein Adler.” (“His father was an actor by the name of Geyer. A Geyer [vulture] is almost an Adler [eagle].”) (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner*, in *Nietzsche’s Werke, Erste Abtheilung, Band VIII* [Leipzig: C.G. Naumann, 1906], 39, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=raDHLnqFdIwC>.) Ironically, Wagner’s ancestral abode was located in the area of Leipzig known as the *Brühl*, which was at the time that city’s Jewish quarter.

¹⁵ For a classic account of the phenomenon of this Wagner-cultus, see Mark Twain, “At the Shrine of St. Wagner,” in *What is Man and Other Essays* (Adelaide: eBooks@Adelaide, 2005), accessed November 27, 2013, http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/t/twain/mark/what_is_man/.

consecrating festival play.” *Parsifal* can be considered Wagner’s symbolicized and spiritualized version of a completed Passion play that fulfilled some of his intentions originally conceived in *Jesus von Nazareth*, albeit refracted through a very different philosophical outlook.

To return to the form of the Passion play itself, Wagner’s near obsession with the “Volk” and his own rather vainglorious conception of himself as the *vox populi* thereof, along with his interest in medieval literary sources, which undergird most of his operatic works, would no doubt lead him to find a vein of his much sought-after ur-German *Volksgeist* in the Passion play as originally conceived. The genre’s reputation for anti-Semitism, primarily in its allegation of collective Jewish guilt for deicide, would also certainly find his approbation. Historically, the most prominent Passion play performance has been that of the Bavarian village of Oberammergau, where it has been produced as a once-per-decade extravaganza since 1634 as penance for its townspeople’s deliverance from the plague. Its anti-Semitic elements would eventually find no less an endorsement than that of Adolf Hitler,¹⁶ and Nazi propaganda would describe the 1934 performance as “‘peasant drama,’ inspired by the ‘consecrating power of the soil.’”¹⁷ It is known for certain that Wagner attended the Oberammergau play, though probably

¹⁶ Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 2003), 22. Hitler is further reported to have commented, in the context of the Oberammergau play, “Rarely has the Jewish threat to the ancient Roman world been so graphically illustrated as in the person of Pontius Pilate in this play; he emerges as a Roman so racially and intellectually superior that he stands out like a rock amid the Jewish dung and rabble.” (Spotts cites Adolf Hitler, *Hitlers Tischgespräche im Führerhauptquartier*, ed. Henry Picker (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1976), entry of July 5, 1942, 422.) Wagner’s own depiction of Pilate in *Jesus von Nazareth*, while certainly contrasting the prefect positively with the Jews, is decidedly more neutral. Hitler took a generally negative view of the historical impact of Christianity, sharing what could be paraphrased as Edward Gibbon’s view that “Rome was broken by Christianity not by the Teutons and Huns,” and referring to “Constantine the Traitor” and “Julian the Steadfast” rather than using the sobriquets of “the Great” and “the Apostate” by which the respectively Christian and pagan emperor are typically known. (Quoted in Spotts, *Hitler*, 22, and Adolf Hitler, *Monologe im Führerhauptquartier 1941–1944*, ed. Werner Jochmann (Hamburg: Knaus, 1980), entry of January 27, 1942, 236.)

¹⁷ Qtd. in “History 20th Century: Official English language website for the Oberammergau Passion Play 2010,” accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.oberammergau-passion.com/en-gb/the-passion-play/the-history/20th-century/history-20th-century.html>.

after his drafting of *Jesus von Nazareth*.¹⁸ Furthermore, Wagner's great patron, "Mad" King Ludwig II of Bavaria, was also a prominent financial supporter of Oberammergau and its drama.¹⁹ While the scriptural basis for the allegation of Jewish deicide has come to be seen as theologically rather dubious and of late has been repudiated in most mainstream Christian liturgies, there is no doubt that the historic portrayal of the Jews in the Passion story in Wagner's time and before was unflattering at best.

Turning to the Passion as a musical form, we find some of this same skeptical ambivalence to the Jews in J. S. Bach's celebrated *Matthäus-Passion*, probably the best known-work of the genre.²⁰ Ironically, however, the great nineteenth-century Bach revival was inaugurated by the 1829 performance of the *Matthäus-Passion* in Berlin under the direction of Felix Mendelssohn,²¹ Wagner's self-appointed foe following his denunciation of Mendelssohn in *Das Judenthum in der Musik*.²² The *Matthäus-Passion* premiered in 1727 in Leipzig's

¹⁸ Janet H. Swift, *The Passion Play of Oberammergau* (New York: F. H. Revell, 1930), 72, and Louise Parks Richards, *Oberammergau: Its Passion Play and Player: A 20th Century Pilgrimage To a Modern Jerusalem and a New Gethsemane* (Munich: Piloty & Loehle, 1910), 43, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=MyIMAAAAMAAJ>. Although these sources do not specify the exact date of Wagner's attendance, given the chronology of his residence in Bavaria, his attendance is likely to postdate his drafting of *Jesus von Nazareth*. Specifically, Hughes in the note below mentions that Ludwig II attended the play in 1871, so it is likely that Wagner's own visit also occurred at that time.

¹⁹ Howard Hughes, *Arts, Entertainment and Tourism* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2000), unnumbered pages.

²⁰ In English, the "St. Matthew Passion."

²¹ See Celia Applegate, *Bach in Berlin: Nation and Culture in Mendelssohn's Revival of the St. Matthew Passion* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press), 2005.

²² In a further instance of possible irony in this regard, one of the primary musical motives of Wagner's *Parsifal*, symbolizing the Holy Grail, is derived from the so-called "Dresden Amen," which Mendelssohn prominently employed and popularized in his Fifth "Reformation" Symphony, which, like Wagner's later *Kaisermarsch*, also quotes Luther's *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*. It is sometimes argued that Wagner became aware of the Dresden Amen during his employment as that city's Kapellmeister during the 1840s, and its use has been detected in his earlier operas *Das Liebesverbot* and *Tannhäuser*. However, Mendelssohn's Fifth Symphony predates (1830) both of these works.

Thomaskirche, the same church in which Wagner was baptized and in which he would study composition under the church cantor in his youth.²³ Wagner was quite familiar with the work. In 1840 during his destitute days in Paris, Wagner praised Bach's Passions effusively:

The Passion-music, almost exclusively the work of [the] great Sebastian Bach, is founded on the Saviour's sufferings as told by the Evangelists; the text is set to music, word by word; but between the divisions of the tale are woven verses from the Church's hymns appropriate to the special subject, and at the most important passages the Chorale itself is sung by the whole assembled parish. Thus the performance of such a Passion-music became a great religious ceremony, in which artists and congregation bore an equal share. What wealth, what fulness of art, what power, radiance, and yet unostentatious purity, breathe from these unique master-works! In them is embodied the whole essence, whole spirit of the German nation; a claim the more justified, as I believe I have proved that these majestic art-creations, too, were products of the heart and habits of the German people.

Church-music therefore owed alike its origin and consummation to the people's need. A like need has never summoned up Dramatic music, with the Germans.²⁴

Wagner clearly saw himself as the facilitator through whom this religious-dramatic aesthetic gap could be bridged and by whom the popular musical will could be enunciated. *Jesus von Nazareth* is a good example of the kind of work in which Wagner seeks to combine these religious and dramatic elements.

Wagner would continue to admire Bach throughout his life,²⁵ with frequent similar comparisons between "Bach's spirit" and "the German spirit."²⁶ In Bach was found "the history

²³ It is further reputed that two members of the *Thomaskirche* choir who sang at Bach's funeral as boys in 1750 also sang as men at Wagner's christening in 1813. "Richard Wagner, son of Bach's city," The London Bach Society, accessed November 27, 2013, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130725133810/http://www.bachlive.co.uk/bach-in-context-2/bach-and-wagner/>.

²⁴ Richard Wagner, "On German Music," in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, vol. 7, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1898), 93-94, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://users.belgacom.net/wagnerlibrary/prose/wagongm.htm>.

²⁵ Wagner's residence in Bayreuth, *Wahnfried* (alluding to a Schopenhauerian "freedom from illusion"), had a portrait of Bach hanging on its wall. ("Richard Wagner, son of Bach's city.")

²⁶ "Bachs Geist, der deutsche Geist, trat aus dem Mysterium der wunderbarsten Musik, seiner Neugeburtstätte, hervor." (Qtd. in Hannu Salmi, "Wagner Quotations," accessed November 27, 2013, <http://users.utu.fi/hansalmi/sit3.html>). Available in translation in Richard Wagner, "What is German?," in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, vol. 4 [London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1895], 163, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://users.belgacom.net/wagnerlibrary/prose/wagwiger.htm>.)

of the German spirit's inmost life throughout the gruesome century of the German Folk's complete extinction."²⁷ Wagner's reverence was no doubt in part due to their shared nationality, as Wagner would likewise valorize the Germanness of other composers like Beethoven; however, it seems that Wagner appreciated Bach's sensibility for spiritual music especially, even referring to him as "the most stupendous miracle in all music!"²⁸ Wagner's *Meistersinger* is his most contrapuntal and polyphonic score and it displays an obvious Bachian influence; Albert Schweitzer avers that "the spirit of Bach is most evident" therein.²⁹ Martin Geck has found other similarities in Bach and Wagner's music, particularly in context of the composers' shared penchant for "endless melody" (Wagner's *unendliche Melodie*), but he also contrasts the pessimistic outlook of Wagner's Schopenhauerianism with the Christian optimism particularly apparent in Bach's *Matthäus-Passion*.³⁰ This contrast in viewpoints belongs, however, to Wagner's later life and not to the period of *Jesus von Nazareth*.

The *Matthäus-Passion* differs significantly from Bach's *Johannes-Passion*, his only other surviving work in the genre, which is comparatively abbreviated and dramatically concentrated. The *Matthäus-Passion*, on the other hand, shares the broad scope of *Jesus von Nazareth*, and is similarly expansive in its mix of expository, lyrical, and interpretive elements, at least as far as can be ascertained from *Jesus von Nazareth*'s incomplete state. As will be seen, Wagner's draft of *Jesus von Nazareth* contains a lengthy middle section of rambling philosophizing meant to undergird the drama, and one would assume, to eventually be integrated into it. Likewise, the

²⁷ "What is German?", 162. Wagner is referring to the vicissitudes of the eighteenth century in Germany.

²⁸ Qtd. in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music*, ed. Michael Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), s.v. "Bach, Johann Sebastian," 36.

²⁹ Qtd. in Paul Elie, *Reinventing Bach* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), 41.

³⁰ Saffle, 192.

Matthäus-Passion was originally intended to be performed with a sermon read during its midpoint interval. In terms of dramatic content, both Wagner and Bach omit Jesus's actual resurrection. Bach likely does so to focus on Jesus's suffering and crucifixion, which Wagner in contrast does not portray. There is also the theological consideration that Jesus's redemptive power is inherent in the crucifixion itself. Given what we know of Wagner's outlook, his own omission of the resurrection is most probably due to an attempt to separate his secularized Jesus from the supernatural. Another difference between Wagner and Bach's dramatic approach is *Jesus von Nazareth's* lack of Bach's omniscient, koryphaios-like "Evangelist" narrator, as Wagner's more naturalistic approach means that his characters must themselves provide their own depth of perspective.³¹ However, in light of the justifiably strong dramatic presence which Wagner assigns to the character of Peter, it should be pointed out that historically he has at times been called the koryphaios of the Apostles.³²

Though much of the groundwork for its success had been laid by seventeenth-century composers like Heinrich Schütz, the Passion as a form of music was most widespread among eighteenth-century German Protestants, with Bach's son C. P. E. Bach composing over twenty versions of his own. However, Bach's *Matthäus-Passion* remains by far the best-known example and is certainly the most likely to have influenced Wagner. One other intriguing composer,

³¹ The κορυφαῖος, in the original Attic dramatic tradition, is the leader of a chorus.

³² See, e.g., Athanasius's statement in his commentary on Psalm 15, verse 8, line 874, in his *Expositions on the Psalms*, "Καὶ Πέτρος γὰρ ὁ κορυφαῖος ἐν ταῖς Πράξεσιν εἰς Χριστὸν ταῦτα προσήρ μωσεν." (Accessed November 27, 2013, http://khazarzar.skeptik.net/pgm/PG_Migne/Athannasius%20the%20Great%20of%20Alexandria_%20PG%2025-28/Expositiones%20in%20Psalmos.pdf.) Throughout this thesis, English and German biblical citations are taken from Bible Gateway, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.biblegateway.com/>. English citations are taken from a variety of translations, but if a translation is not specified, they are taken from the English Standard Version. All German citations are taken from Martin Luther's *Luther Bibel 1545*. All Greek and Hebrew biblical citations are taken from Bible Hub, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://biblos.com/>. Among Greek citations with differing textual variants, the Westcott and Hort 1881 version is preferred, unless otherwise specified.

though, is the seventeenth-century Thomas Strutz, whose Passions may be the first to include actual arias delivered by Jesus himself, pointing the way toward a increasing humanization of Christ which certainly nears its apogee in Wagner's own quasi-Arian Christology.³³ While J. S. Bach assigns the role of Jesus to be sung by a bass, presumably to convey a sense of profundity, serenity, and solemnity, one can speculate that Wagner would have found such a tessitura to be overly detached and otherworldly, and would perhaps have assigned Jesus the voice of a *Heldentenor* – as indeed, he does for the eponymous protagonist of *Parsifal* – in order to emphasize his Jesus's humanity.³⁴ This is indeed the approach taken by Wagner's hero Beethoven in his 1803 oratorio *Christus am Ölberge*, discussed further below.³⁵

The Passion tradition was continued into the nineteenth century in the revived form of the oratorio. Among Mendelssohn's sacred oratorios, his 1836 *Paulus* shows the most formal influence from Bach's *Matthäus-Passion*. It includes the voice of Jesus, who exclaims from on high, "Saul! Saul! Was verfolgst [sic] du mich?", which Mendelssohn represents through a chorus of female voices, seeming thereby to underscore Jesus's celestial nature.³⁶ Wagner somewhat ironically praised *Paulus* as a "classic" and a "masterwork" that was "touching and uplifting" (though Wagner's review was in fact only published posthumously, in 1899).³⁷ This

³³ Arianism, not to be confused with the racist Aryanism, was the non-Trinitarian theological position, deemed heretical at Nicaea in AD 325, that emphasized the human nature of Jesus as God the Son, as a consequence of his asserted creation by, and thus subordination to, God the Father.

³⁴ "Heroic tenor," a variety of German *Stimmfach*, or vocal category.

³⁵ *Christ on the Mount of Olives*. In addition to the tenor Jesus and chorus, Beethoven's other soloists are an angel sung by a soprano and Peter sung by a bass.

³⁶ "Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?" Smither's quotation uses "verfolgst," although the correct German would be "verfolgt." Howard E. Smither, *A History of the Oratorio, Vol. 4: The Oratorio in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 82.

³⁷ Qtd. in Smither, 166. Smither cites Wagner, *Sämtliche Schriften*, vol. 12, 149-150.

was despite Wagner's own previous condemnation of the oratorio as a form in general. As early as in his brief 1834 article *Die deutsche Oper*, Wagner had negatively contrasted the "laughable" oratorios of contemporary composers such as Friedrich Schneider with the "truthful" and "venerable" works of Bach and Händel, asking rhetorically, "For is it not plainly to misconstrue the present age, to go on writing Oratorios when no one believes any longer in either their contents or their forms?"³⁸ In his 1849 *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, Wagner lauds the development of the Passion as an "energetic" flowering of Protestant church music, but lambastes the oratorio, particularly when relocated to the secular concert hall, describing such works as "the sexless embryos of Opera"³⁹ and "that unnatural abortion."⁴⁰ Wagner essentially saw the musical form of the oratorio as giving short shrift to its dramatic content, a failing which his own music-dramas were intended to rectify; thus *Jesus von Nazareth* appears likewise to be intended for dramatic rather than declamatory treatment.

Mendelssohn also began the composition of an oratorio specifically addressing the life of Christ, *Christus*, which was uncompleted at the time of his death in 1847. Though portions of the unfinished work were performed beginning in 1852, it is not known whether Wagner was cognizant of this. Nor does Wagner himself frequently comment on other contemporaneous sacred oratorios, such as Beethoven's *Christus*, which portrays Christ much more humanistically than Bach had, depicting his emotionally-wrenching decision to accept his fate of crucifixion;

³⁸ Richard Wagner, "On German Opera," in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, vol. 8, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1899), 58, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://users.belgacom.net/wagnerlibrary/prose/waggerm.htm>.

³⁹ Richard Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future*, in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, vol. 1, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1895), 131, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://users.belgacom.net/wagnerlibrary/prose/wagartfut.htm>.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 151. The original German is "die naturwidrige Ausgeburt," which Smither (p. 83) renders as "an 'unnatural, evil excrescence.'"

neither does Wagner discuss Albert Lortzing's 1828 *Die Himmelfahrt Jesu Christi*.⁴¹ Indeed, despite Wagner's near-idolization of Beethoven in particular, neither of these works was then or is now well-known enough to have entered the standard repertory. Wagner does, however, discuss in *Mein Leben* the relative merits of religiously-themed two vocal works by the contemporary composer Ferdinand Hiller, with whom Wagner was acquainted in Dresden. These were the oratorio *Die Zerstörung Jerusalems* and the opera *Der Traum in der Christnacht*.⁴² While Wagner is typically dismissive of Hiller in *Mein Leben*, jealousy of the relative success of *Der Traum* at a time when he was struggling to secure performances of his own operas may have planted in Wagner's mind the notion of creating a religious composition of his own.

Martin Luther, Protestantism, and Catholicism

There is ample evidence that Wagner had a particular fascination with and indeed admiration for Martin Luther. Wagner's appreciation of Luther remained relatively constant throughout his life, and although many of the examples presented here postdate his drafting of *Jesus von Nazareth*, they necessarily demonstrate his denominational outlook, which was a critical factor in his conception of that document, and in his unquestioning usage of the Lutheran Bible translation.

In Wagner's mind, Luther represented a shining beacon of presciently embryonic German nationalism refracted through a purifying spiritual lens. Given that Wagner himself aspired to such an idealized identity, it is not hard to see Luther's appeal for him. In his diary, Wagner

⁴¹ *The Ascension of Jesus Christ*.

⁴² Wagner, *My Life* (1983), 294-295. The titles are translated as *The Destruction of Jerusalem* and *Christmas Night's Dream*, respectively.

hyperbolically and egotistically proclaimed, “Now it is *me* no one grasps: I am the most German being, I am the German spirit. Question the incomparable magic of *my* works, compare them with the rest: and you can, for the present, say no differently than that - it is *German*.”⁴³ Wagner also certainly approved of Luther’s artistic orientation as a noted hymnist and initiator of the Protestant musical tradition. The choruses of Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, for example, strongly resemble Lutheran chorales in form and at times even in content. It is not incidental that *Die Meistersinger* is generally regarded as Wagner’s most “German” work. Its protagonist, Hans Sachs, even performs part of a song penned by his real historical counterpart, “The Nightingale at Wittenberg,” praising Luther’s reformative efforts.⁴⁴

Wagner’s so-called “Kaisermarsch” also presents a concatenation of this heady brew of nationalism, religion, and music. Written to commemorate the establishment of the German Empire following the victory of the Franco-Prussian War, its triumphalistic tone incorporates the main theme of Luther’s well-known hymn *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott* as a recurring motive of what in context comes across to the listener as an annunciation of German spiritual destiny.

We also know, for instance, that Wagner contemplated a dramatic project entitled *Luthers Hochzeit*, concerning the marriage of the ex-monk Luther to the ex-nun Katharina von Bora. This

⁴³ Emphasis in original. Richard Wagner, *The Diary of Richard Wagner 1865–1882: The Brown Book*, ed. Joachim Bergfeld, trans. George Byrd (London: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 73. German original: “Jetzt begreift *mich* kein Mensch: ich bin der deutscheste Mensch, ich bin der deutsche Geist. Fragt den unvergleichlichen Zauber *meiner* Werke, haltet sie mit allem übrigen zusammen: Ihr könnt für jetzt nichts anderes sagen, als - es ist *deutsch*.” (Richard Wagner, *Das Braune Buch: Tagebuchaufzeichnungen 1865 bis 1882*, ed. Joachim Bergfeld [Zürich: Atlantis, 1975], 86.)

⁴⁴ See letter to Mathilde Wesendonck of May 22, 1862, no. 278. (Richard Wagner, *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, ed. and trans. Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington [New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987], 545.) Cf., e.g., Wagner’s Act III choral exhortation, “Wach’ auf, es nahet gen den Tag (Awake! now the dawn of day is seen),” based on poetic lines penned by the historical Hans Sachs praising the enlightening advent of the Reformation, to the National Socialist rallying-cry “Deutschland erwache (Germany awake!).” Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph des Willens* further cements this connection with its use of Wagner’s *Meistersinger* Act III *Vorspiel*, which contains the “Wach’ auf” motif in orchestral form, to accompany morning footage of the city of Nuremberg during 1934 Nazi *Reichsparteitag*.

seems to have been initiated in August 1868.⁴⁵ Though Wagner quickly abandoned the idea, and the text of the scenario appears not to have survived, it seems that Wagner in fact intended the drama as “a comedy in one act,” written “to combat depression.”⁴⁶

Wagner’s interest in Luther continued even as his interest in Buddhism grew. We find among Wagner’s posthumous writings a fragment entitled “Mariafeld. April 1864.”

Buddha—Luther.—India—North Germany: between: Catholicism. (South—North.) Middle Ages. By the Ganges gentle, pure renunciation: in Germany monkish impossibility: Luther lays bare the climatic impossibility of carrying out the meek renunciation taught by Buddha: it will not answer here, where we must eat flesh, drink brew, clothe thick, and warmly lodge: here we must compromise; our life here is so plagued, that without “Wine, Woman and Song” we could not possibly hold out, or serve the good old God himself.—⁴⁷

Wagner’s geographic and cultural concerns echo those that we will see in his *Religion und Kunst*, though here he appears resigned to the fundamental compromises needed to live life rather than embittered against them. Wagner’s personal life, was, in any event, more a process of pragmatic adaptation than of principled consistency. It is clear also that Wagner sees an intellectual kinship between Protestantism, Buddhism, and their respective founders. He does not, however, draw an explicit parallel, “polytheist” or otherwise, between Catholicism and Hinduism.

And yet, for all of this, Luther did not have much to offer Wagner in terms of the artistic portrayal of the Christian Passion. Luther had in fact enjoined against such endeavors, sermonizing that “the Passion of Christ should not be acted out in words and pretense, but in real

⁴⁵ *The Harvard Biographical Dictionary of Music*, ed. Don Michael Randel (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), s.v. “Wagner, Richard,” 962. Luther’s wedding clearly retains cultural relevance even apart from its metaphorical abrogation of clerical celibacy, as there remains to this day a municipal festival in Wittenberg in its commemoration.

⁴⁶ Westernhagen, 608.

⁴⁷ Richard Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth and Other Writings*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 386.

life.”⁴⁸ The re-actualization of the Passion in the practicing life of the believer, as with the emulation of Christ’s life in general, appears to go a step beyond Wagner’s aestheticized interpretation. In Kierkegaardian terms, such a movement toward the religious mindset could only be initiated by a jettisoning of the aesthetic life for that of ethical action. Confronted with such a rejoinder, Wagner would likely have argued that his music-dramas were intended to engender the same inspiration on the part of their audience. Indeed, the Wagner of the period of *Jesus von Nazareth* in particular had intended his operas to function as a sort of musical guide to social revolution.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Luther’s desire to remove the Passion from the realm of “pretense” to that of “real life” certainly prefigures the criticism of Weinel and others noted above, i.e., that Wagner’s own religious insincerity inevitably vitiated the intended religious impact of his artistic output.

It is also ironic to note that Luther’s ideal of the Passion as re-lived in the life of the believer to some extent recalls the Catholic doctrine of the Mass, strenuously opposed by Protestantism, in which Christ is thought to be continually re-sacrificed with each celebration of the Eucharist. Wagner’s attempts to remove both the Passion of Christ and the Eucharistic commemoration thereof to a more rarified aesthetic realm may therefore actually make him at least in this regard more Protestant than Luther himself, as it were. The poet August Wilhelm Schlegel had detected an analogue between the observing spectator’s dialogue with nature and the Eucharist,⁵⁰ even going so far as to conceive of life as a “continuous Holy Communion.”⁵¹ It

⁴⁸ Alternative translation: “For Christ’s Passion must be dealt with not in words and a show, but in our lives and in truth.” See Martin Luther, “Assorted Luther Sermons,” accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.reformationhappens.com/works/sermons-luther/>.

⁴⁹ Cf., e.g. Wagner’s *Die Kunst und die Revolution*.

⁵⁰ William Pars and Philippe Jacques de Louthembourg, “Neoclassicism and Romanticism,” accessed November 27, 2013, http://www.all-art.org/neoclassicism/romantic_eral.html.

is not a far stretch, then to see how “many a Protestant theologian placed the experience of nature on the same plane as the experience of the sacrament. Art, too, came to be seen in an ever more religious light.”⁵² While Wagner would concern himself with the ritual of Communion directly in *Das Liebesmahl der Apostel* and *Parsifal*, his entire mature oeuvre reflects the sensibility of art-as-religion, with the audience as communicant. In *Jesus von Nazareth* this is taken to the level of the direct artistic explication of religion itself, with the Eucharist originated on stage in the form of the Last Supper.

Wagner’s interest in Luther underscores the obvious conclusion that his Christian outlook was decidedly Protestant in orientation, as far as it can be conventionally categorized. Wagner was raised in the Protestant tradition, though this is of lesser concern given his notably egoistic penchant for self-discovery as an adult. In fact Wagner’s sympathy with Protestantism stemmed in great part from his decided antipathy to Catholicism. Aberbach ranks this distaste of Wagner’s as second only to his hostility toward Judaism, itself no mean feat, with his animus particularly directed at the Jesuits.⁵³

As one would expect, particularly problematic for Wagner was “the damaging effect of the Catholic church in Germany’s development.”⁵⁴ The idea of Luther as a German nationalist conjoins nicely with this theme of a Catholic yoke weighing down the Fatherland. Given

⁵¹ Norbert Wolf, *Caspar David Friedrich: The Painter of Stillness* (Hong Kong: Taschen, 2006), 51.

⁵² Pars and de Louthembourg.

⁵³ Alan David Aberbach, *The Ideas of Richard Wagner: An Examination and Analysis of his Major Aesthetic, Political, Economic, Social, and Religious Thoughts* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1988), 254.

⁵⁴ Qtd. in *ibid.*

Wagner's admiration for Luther, it should also come as no surprise that the anti-Semitism of the two men is similarly congruent in terms of its outlines, if not its fundamental motivations.

Though the examples in Wagner's anti-Catholic writings are legion, the following correspondence with Franz Liszt, himself a Catholic of ever-increasing faith,⁵⁵ is particularly appropriate vis-à-vis *Jesus von Nazareth*:

The pious man does not love: what matters to him is simply domination. I know what I am saying. To me all this Catholic rubbish is repugnant to the very depths of my soul: anyone who takes refuge in that must have a great deal to atone for.⁵⁶

We see here the same conflation and abhorrence of organized religion and clerical power to be found in *Jesus von Nazareth*. Despite his at times mystical outlook, Wagner's anti-clericalism mirrors that of, say, Voltaire, and in this respect he truly was a child of the Enlightenment.⁵⁷ "Taking refuge" in Catholic dogma implies a weak-mindedness on the part of the adherent and a refusal to think for oneself – *Sapere aude*, as it were.⁵⁸ The incompatibility of presumably empty

⁵⁵ Liszt did make efforts to proselytize Wagner. In a letter of April 8, 1853, Liszt wrote to Wagner: "*Lass zu dem Glauben Dich neu bekehren, es gibt ein Glück;*" this is the only thing that is true and eternal. I cannot preach to you, nor explain it to you; but I will pray to God that He may powerfully illumine your heart through His faith and His love. You may scoff at this feeling as bitterly as you like. I cannot fail to see and desire in it the only salvation. Through Christ alone, through resigned suffering in God, salvation and rescue come to us. (Richard Wagner and Franz Liszt, *Correspondence of Wagner and Liszt: 1841-53*, vol. 1, trans. Francis Hueffer [New York: Scribner and Welford, 1889], letter to Liszt of April 8, 1853, no. 105, 273, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=ajA5AAAAIAAJ>.)

⁵⁶ Qtd. in Aberbach, 254-255. Aberbach cautions that the above outburst to Liszt was in part occasioned by Wagner's illness at the time and his wife Cosima's absence while sojourning with her father (Liszt). However, Wagner did ultimately manage to convert Cosima to Protestantism, which at the time led her to feel that they were finally completely united as a couple – though her enthusiasm would certainly sour. (See Cosima Wagner, *Cosima Wagner's Diaries*, vol. 1, 1869-1877, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack, trans. Geoffrey Skelton [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978], entry of Thursday, October 31, 1872, 548.)

⁵⁷ Wagner did appreciate the Catholic mystic Meister Eckhart, likely in part due to his German nationality, and included his writings on a plan for the instruction of his son Siegfried (Aberbach, 257). Eckhart had, however, been declared a heretic, and had by Wagner's time come to be seen as a forerunner of Luther due to his inveighing against indulgences and other clerical abuses.

⁵⁸ "Dare to know."

piety and presumably heartfelt love is also strongly reflective of Wagner's mindset in *Jesus von Nazareth*.

The diaries of Wagner's second wife Cosima, Liszt's daughter, are extensive, and, given the degree of her obsession with and reverence for her husband,⁵⁹ they have been heavily mined by historians seeking to gain insights into Wagner psyche. Several entries remark on Wagner's denominational views:

Thursday, June 23, 1870: In the morning, R. talks about Protestantism, "which can only be understood as a *protest* against every confession in favor of the true core of religion, which lies in its nature. This is what one must make clear to a child, while teaching him only the life of Christ, in all its simplicity and nobility. Besides that, tolerance toward other religions, familiarity with Greek myths, which as a diagnosis of life are very profound, even if they bring no salvation."⁶⁰

Wagner clearly saw "true" religion as self-revelatory, and reflected in the personal example of Christ, which, in *Jesus von Nazareth*, certainly reflects the virtues of a kind of "aristocracy of the soul" achieved through humility.⁶¹ This statement also reflects Wagner's tendency toward a sort of "Jesuitism," the adherence to the personal philosophies and teachings of Jesus rather than to the trappings of religion propounded in his name, which may or may not coincide with orthodox Christianity. However, Wagner's supposed advocacy of tolerance obviously rings fairly hollow.⁶²

⁵⁹ Despite Wagner's philandering, Cosima's reaction to his death is emblematic of her spousal devotion and certainly is comparable to the macabre of other nineteenth-century widows like Queen Victoria. She is known to have remained alone with his body for over a day, to have cut off her hair to be sown into a pillow for Wagner, and to have had to have been removed from the open grave when she tried to lie down with the coffin. Other than her management of the Bayreuth Festival, she lived the rest of her life as a virtual recluse. (See, e.g., Frederic Spotts, *Bayreuth: A History of the Wagner Festival* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994], 90 ff.)

⁶⁰ Cosima Wagner, vol. 1, entry of Thursday, June 23, 1870, 236-237.

⁶¹ Cf. the title of Julius Evola's *Ride the Tiger: A Survival Manual for the Aristocrats of the Soul*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin and Constance Fontana (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2003).

⁶² Wagner did have his moments of tolerance, particularly when artistic quality was at stake. To cite but one example, Wagner demanded that Hermann Levi, the Jewish son of a rabbi and his chosen *Parsifal* conductor, submit to baptism, which Levi refused. Wagner then proceeded to harass Levi unceasingly until he eventually resigned, forcing Wagner to (successfully) beg him back by proclaiming "You are my *Parsifal* conductor." (Spotts, *Bayreuth*,

On Monday, July 17, 1871, Cosima records Wagner as having read a pamphlet by the anti-theological theologian Franz Overbeck, received via Nietzsche. Nietzsche and Overbeck were close friends and in fact lived on different floors of the same house in Basel. Overbeck would go on to publish *Über die Christlichkeit unserer heutigen Theologie*⁶³ in 1875, which, reacting to D. F. Strauss, criticized both liberal and conservative theologies as failed attempts at scientizing Christianity, and divorced from its true essence, as Christianity could brook no knowledge outside of itself. Cosima states that Wagner reacted to Overbeck as follows:

“The Catholics are quite right when they say the Bible must not be read by profane people, for religion is for those who can neither read nor write. But they played such shameful havoc with their interpretations that Luther became the only one who could take his stand on the Bible. He did indeed in that way open the doors to science and to criticism, but Christ will continue to live all the same.”⁶⁴

Here again we see Wagner conceiving of religion as an organically-arising popular phenomenon, independent of clerical structures. The Church before Luther misused the Bible and corrupted its meaning. The message of Jesus himself is seen as the kernel of faith whose internal strength means that it will survive external challenges.

As has been noted, much of what we know about Wagner’s denominational views postdates the period of *Jesus von Nazareth*. However, it is not unreasonable to assume that his

80.) Spotts finds irony in Wagner’s baptismal demand, in light of Wagner being “an anti-clerical agnostic who despised the Christian church.” (ibid.) Levi was later a pallbearer at Wagner’s funeral. Other friendly Jewish associations of Wagner’s include Samuel Lehrs, a Parisian philologist who may have introduced Wagner to Feuerbach’s philosophy, Franz Liszt’s student Karl Tausig, the music critic Heinrich Porges, the pianist Josef Rubenstein, and the singers Lilli and Marie Lehmann. (See Milton E. Brenner, *Richard Wagner and the Jews* [Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2006].) The performances of the latter pair in Wagner’s *Ring* discredited his own anti-Semitic theories in *Das Judentum in der Musik*.

⁶³ Roughly, *How Christian is Our Present-Day Theology?*

⁶⁴ Cosima Wagner, vol. 1, entry of Monday, July 17, 1871, 390-391.

outlook in this regard remained relatively stable, as indeed we have seen that it remained, like his anti-Semitism, an *idée fixe* throughout the documents that shed light on his thinking.⁶⁵

Chapter 2: Wagner's Internal Development

Wagner's Revolutionary Mentality

Wagner's fascination with revolution predates his radical Dresden years and the upheavals of 1848 and dates back to at least 1830. In his "Autobiographische Skizze" of 1843, Wagner relates that his incipient musical career had begun, "but now the July Revolution took place; with one bound I became a revolutionist, and acquired the conviction that every decently active being ought to occupy himself with politics exclusively. I was only happy in the company of political writers and I commenced an Overture upon a political theme."⁶⁶ Concern with revolution would remain a smoldering ember in Wagner's psyche which would crescendo to the conflagration of 1848-1849, of which *Jesus von Nazareth* became one example. Wagner in the autumn of 1848 cryptically recorded in one of his diaries, known as the *Annals*: "Break now decided. – Solitude: communist ideas on fashioning of mankind of the future in a way conducive to art."⁶⁷ Wagner's view of art and social revolution as inextricably intertwined was already

⁶⁵ Indeed, what we have seen of Wagner's anti-Catholicism puts paid to Nietzsche's assessment of Wagner's final opera Parsifal, in some ways inspired by *Jesus von Nazareth*, that "what you hear is *Rome — Rome's faith without the text*," (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans Walter Kaufman [New York: Vintage Books, 1989], "§ 256," 198) a statement so at odds with the content of the work that it is to be adjudged a product of hostility rather than genuine analysis.

⁶⁶ Richard Wagner, "Autobiographic Sketch," in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, vol. 1, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1895), 6, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://users.belgacom.net/wagnerlibrary/prose/wagauto.htm>.

⁶⁷ Qtd. in Magee, 42.

well-formed. In 1849, he would write to his first wife Minna that he had become “a revolutionary, plain and simple.”⁶⁸

Wagner’s anti-materialist mentality was also on the increase during these years. In 1844 he wrote,

I hate this fast growing tendency to chain men to machines in big factories and deprive them of all joy in their efforts — the plan will lead to cheap men and cheap products. I set my face against it and plead for the dignity and health of the open air, and the olden time.⁶⁹

Wagner instead thought that “Nature” supplied “the greatest pleasure men ever know as a reward for doing good work.”⁷⁰ This naturism is a sentiment which is not emphasized in *Jesus von Nazareth*, but would be displayed in later works influenced by it, like *Parsifal*. It should also be pointed out amid these references to communism and the seeming alienation of labor that it is considered fairly certain that Wagner did not come into contact with the works of Karl Marx or Friedrich Engels, and particularly not their celebrated *Communist Manifesto*, though he may have encountered Marx’s ideas in his conversations with Bakunin.⁷¹

Speech to the *Vaterslandsverein*

Wagner’s revolutionary sentiments were also evident in a political speech he delivered on June 14, 1848 to Dresden’s republican-socialist *Vaterslandsverein*,⁷² run by his friend and

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Qtd. in Elbert Hubbard, *Little Journeys to the Homes of Great Musicians: Richard Wagner* (East Aurora, NY: Roycrofters, 1901), 15, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=j4kyAQAMA AJ>.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Samuel R. Delany, “Wagner/Artaud: a Play of 19th and 20th Century Critical Fictions,” in *Longer Views: Extended Essays* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 52.

⁷² “Fatherland Association” or “Union.”

colleague August Röckel.⁷³ It was published two days later in the *Dresdner Anzeiger*.⁷⁴ The motto of the *Vaterlandsverein* was “The will of the people is law.”⁷⁵ Wagner attempted to praise the Saxon king for the modest republican reformatory efforts that had theretofore already been undertaken, and put forth a logically tortuous argument that the granting of freedoms by the king will break the fetters of “monarchy” while creating the true, just expression of “kinghood.”⁷⁶ The distinction is a narrow one, and Wagner nevertheless ended up running afoul of the authorities. Ironically, though perhaps understandably so given the nature of his royal employment, Wagner had previously written several pieces for chorus, winds, and brass praising the current monarch Friedrich August II (the 1844 *Gruss seiner Treuen an Friedrich August den Geliebten*) as well as his ancestor Friedrich August I (the 1843 *Festgesang*, also known as *Der Tag erscheint*).⁷⁷ Palant asserts that Wagner’s manipulation of the bass vocal line in the former piece to highlight a reference to the anteprevious king as “a faithful Christian” (though Wagner, in contrast to his usual practice, did not write the text of this work) is evidence of an attempt to reference the Protestant Reformation.⁷⁸ To add a further wrinkle to Wagner’s relationship with the Saxon

⁷³ Ernest Newman, *Wagner As Man and Artist* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1989), 383.

⁷⁴ Richard Wagner, *German Art and German Policy*, in *Richard Wagner’s Prose Works*, vol. 4, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1895), 138, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=zEUIAQAAMAAJ>.

⁷⁵ Ferdinand Praeger, *Wagner As I Knew Him* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1892), 155, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=XOkqAAAAYAAJ>.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁷⁷ The titles are translated as, respectively, *Greetings to the Beloved Friedrich August from his Loyal Subjects* and *Festival Song* or *The Day Appears*. See Jonathan Palant, “Richard Wagner’s Choruses for Men’s Voices,” *Choral Journal*, vol. 54, no. 2 (May 2012): 63, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.jonathanpalant.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Wagner-Article.pdf>.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

monarchy, his close friend and frequent correspondent Theodor Uhlig, a musician, critic, and composer, was in fact the illegitimate son of Friedrich August II.⁷⁹

In the *Vaterlandsverein* speech, Wagner several times invokes the example of Jesus, calling initially for a break with the odious aspects of the past society: “If a limb offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee.”⁸⁰ He quickly moves to the question of “whether Money is to be left the power of stunting the fair free Will of Man to the most repulsive passion, to avarice, to usury and the sharper’s itch?”⁸¹ The answer, of course, is that it must not:

We shall perceive that Human Society is maintained by the *activity of its members*, and not through any fancied agency of *money*: in clear conviction shall we find the *principle*—God will give us light to find the rightful *law* to put it into practice; and like a hideous nightmare will this demoniac idea of Money vanish from us, with all its loathsome retinue of open and secret usury, paper-juggling, percentage and bankers’ speculations. That will be the *full emancipation of the human race*; that will be the *fulfilment of Christ’s pure teaching*, which enviously they hide from us behind parading dogmas, invented erst to bind the simple world of raw barbarians, to prepare them for a development towards whose higher consummation we now must march in lucid consciousness. Or does this smack to you of *Communism*? Are ye foolish or ill-disposed enough to declare the necessary redemption of the human race from the flattest, most demoralising servitude to vulgarest matter, synonymous with carrying out the most preposterous and senseless doctrine, that of Communism?⁸²

Wagner goes on to declare that his denunciation of money should not be interpreted as a threat, but rather as a warning against the communism that may spontaneously result if his ideas are not implemented.⁸³ Given our knowledge of Wagner’s private journalistic musings, it is clear that his purported aversion to communism here is largely calculated to make his views more palatable for public consumption. The mature Wagner would later (1872) somewhat disingenuously disclaim

⁷⁹ John Warrack and James Deaville, *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Uhlig, Theodor” (Oxford University Press), accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/28718>.

⁸⁰ Wagner, *German Art and German Policy*, 137.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 139.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 140.

the notion that he had ever advocated communism in a political sense, but had instead merely intended to employ the term philosophically, “in contradistinction to *Egoism*.”⁸⁴ However, during this revolutionary phase, Wagner did oppose the two terms on the level of life-philosophies, as he declares in *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* that the history of the world since the shattering of his idealized Grecian golden age and down to the present “is, therefore, the history of *absolute Egoism*; and the end of this period will be its redemption into *Communism*.”⁸⁵

Wagner defines communism even more abstractly in a note appending this passage:

It is a political crime to use this word: however, there is none which will better describe the direct antithesis of *Egoism*. Whosoever is ashamed to-day to pass current as an Egoist—and indeed no one will openly confess himself as such—must allow us to take the liberty of calling him a Communist.⁸⁶

Wagner himself would eventually admit that the confusion of such statements was largely the result of his perhaps over-eager appropriation of Feuerbach’s ideas: “Actively aroused by the perusal of some of *Ludwig Feuerbach’s* essays, I had borrowed various terms of abstract nomenclature and applied them to artistic ideas with which they could not always closely harmonise.”⁸⁷

The *Vaterlandsverein* speech is remarkable in its foreshadowing of most of the main themes of *Jesus von Nazareth*. It wraps its clear anti-materialist animus in the cloak of Jesus himself, as distinct from the officially authoritative doctrines of the religious hierarchy. The law,

⁸⁴ Richard Wagner, *Art and Revolution*, in *Richard Wagner’s Prose Works*, vol. 1, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1895), 27, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://users.belgacom.net/wagnerlibrary/prose/wagartrev.htm>.

⁸⁵ Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future*, 166-167.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Richard Wagner, *Art and Revolution*, in *Richard Wagner’s Prose Works*, vol. 1, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1895), 25, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://users.belgacom.net/wagnerlibrary/prose/wagartrev.htm>.

as it currently stands, must at the least be abrogated for a more “rightful” state of affairs to exist, again as inspired by God. The implementation of all of this is presented as the teleological finalization of human destiny, and Wagner does not so much as bat an eyelash at the actual feasibility and achievability of this revolutionary enterprise.

***Volksblätter* Articles**

Wagner published an inflammatory article in the Dresden *Volksblätter*, a journal run by Röckel, entitled “Die Revolution,” on Sunday, April 8, 1849, only about a month before the actual Dresden uprising took place.⁸⁸ Wagner would himself take over responsibility for the publication of the *Volksblätter* after Röckel had to flee to Prague to avoid arrest.⁸⁹ Wagner had published another article in the same publication, entitled “Der Mensch und die bestehende Gesellschaft,”⁹⁰ on February 10, 1849, which argues, “that because men are fundamentally social beings, and “are not only *entitled*, but *bound* to require Society to lead them to ever higher, purer happiness through perfecting their mental, moral, and corporeal faculties.”⁹¹ The failure of “Established Society” to complete this task, which Wagner says it leaves to “Chance (Zufall),” justifies its overthrow. Though the “Gesellschaft” article contains less that is germane to *Jesus*

⁸⁸ While both of the *Volksblätter* articles discussed here were originally published without attribution, there is a scholarly consensus on the verisimilitude of Wagner’s authorship.

⁸⁹ Anthony Arblaster, *Viva la Libertà!: Politics in Opera* (London: Verso, 1992), 149.

⁹⁰ “Man and Established Society.” English translation found in Richard Wagner, “Man and Established Society,” in *Jesus of Nazareth and Other Writings*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 227-231; German original available at Richard Wagner, “Der Mensch und die bestehende Gesellschaft,” accessed November 27, 2013, <http://users.utu.fi/hansalmi/texts/beste.html>.

⁹¹ Emphasis in original. Wagner, “Man and Established Society,” 230. Cf. “Die Menschen sind daher nicht nur *berechtigt*, sondern auch *verpflichtet*, an die *Gesellschaft die Anforderung zu stellen*: sie durch Vervollkommnung ihrer geistigen, sittlichen und körperlichen Fähigkeiten zu immer höherem, reinerem Glücke zu führen.” (Wagner, “Der Mensch und die bestehende Gesellschaft.”)

von Nazareth than does “Die Revolution,” it does point the way toward the revolutionary mentality of the latter using the same sort of quasi-religious sanctifying terminology, describing man’s fight against existing society as “the holiest, the sublimest ever fought.”⁹²

In “Die Revolution,” Wagner personifies his foreseen revolution as a goddess, both “destroying and fulfilling” (“vernichtend und beseelend” [literally, “blessing”]) in the sort of “creative destruction” in which Wagner’s Jesus would engage by way of Bakunin.⁹³ Wagner’s deified revolution takes on messianic overtones in an extensive, ecstatically annunciatory monologue, here quoted at length due to its striking resemblance to the tone of *Jesus von Nazareth*:

I am the e'er-rejuvenating, ever-fashioning Life; where *I* am not, is Death! I am the dream, the balm, the hope of sufferers ! I bring to nothing what exists, and whither I turn there wells fresh life from the dead rock. I come to you, to break all fetters that oppress you, to redeem you from the arms of Death and pour young Life through all your veins. Whatever stands, must fall:⁹⁴ such is the everlasting law of Nature, such the condition of Life; and I, the eternal destroyer, fulfil the law and fashion ever-youthful life. From its root up will I destroy the order of things in which ye live, for it is sprung from sin, its flower is misery and its fruit is crime; but the harvest is ripe, and *I* am the reaper. I will destroy each phantom that has rule o'er men. I will destroy the dominion of one over many, of the dead o'er the living, of matter over spirit; **I** will break the power of the mighty, of law, of property. Be *his own* will the lord of man, his *own* desire his only law, his strength his whole possession, *for the only Holiness is the free man, and naught higher there is than he*. Annulled be the fancy that gives One power over millions, makes millions subject to the will of one, the doctrine that One has power to bless all others. Like may not rule over like; like has no higher potence than its equal: *and as ye all are equal, I will destroy all rulership of one over other*.

Annulled be the fancy that gives Death power over Life, the Past o'er the Future. The law of the dead is *their own* law; it shares their lot, and dies with them; it shall not govern Life. *Life is law unto itself*. And since the Law is for the living, not the dead, and *ye* are living, with none conceivable above you, *ye yourselves are the law, your own free will the sole and highest law, and I will destroy all dominion of Death over Life*.

Annulled be the fancy that makes man bonds slave to his handiwork, to property. Man's highest good is his fashioning force, the fount whence springs all happiness forever; and not in the *created*, in the *act of creation itself*, in the *exercise of your powers* lies your true highest

⁹² Wagner, “Man and Established Society,” 230.

⁹³ English translation: Richard Wagner, “The Revolution,” trans. William Ashton Ellis, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.trell.org/wagner/revolu.html>. German original: Richard Wagner, “Die Revolution,” accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.trell.org/wagner/revolu.html>.

⁹⁴ Translator Ashton Ellis relates this to Erda’s procreation “Alles, was ist, endet,” in *Das Rheingold*.

enjoyment. Man's work is lifeless; the living shall not bind itself to what is lifeless, not make itself a thrall to that. So away with the bugbear that restrains enjoyment, that hems free force, that sets up Property outside of Man, and makes him thrall to his own work.

...

I will destroy the existing order of things, which parts this one mankind into hostile nations, into powerful and weak, privileged and outcast, rich and poor; for it makes *unhappy* men of all. I will destroy the order of things that turns millions to slaves of a few, and these few to slaves of their own might, own riches. I will destroy this order of things, that cuts enjoyment off from labour, makes labour a load (*Last*), enjoyment a vice (*Laster*), makes *one* man wretched through want, *another* through overflow. I will destroy this order of things, which wastes man's powers in service of dead matter, which keeps the half of humankind in inactivity or useless toil, binds hundreds of thousands to devote their vigorous youth-in busy idleness as soldiers, placemen, speculators and money-spinners-to the maintenance of these depraved conditions, whilst the other half must shore the whole disgraceful edifice at cost of over-taxing all their strength and sacrificing every taste of life. ... *Two* peoples, only, are there from henceforth: the one, that follows me, the other, that withstands me. The one I lead to happiness; over the other grinds my path: for I am *Revolution*, I am the ever-fashioning Life, I am the only God, to whom each creature testifies, who spans and gives both life and happiness to all that is!⁹⁵

Wagner leaves the reader with the impression that he could continue in this vein indefinitely. The effect is remarkable in its overbearingly optimistic, humanistic apocalypticism. Key themes from *Jesus von Nazareth* are present, including the prominent denigration of the law and of materialism. Earlier in the article, Wagner makes clear that the revolution casts aside those who would pervert it for materialist ends, as we find a man “speculating on the approach of the apparition, running off to the Bourse, minutely reckoning the rise and fall of bondlets (Papierchen), higgling and haggling (und shachert und feilscht), alert to catch the least percentlet (Procentchen), till all his plunder scatters to the winds.”⁹⁶ It is indeed difficult to escape the thought that in his nigh-continual denunciations of monetary materialism, Wagner was also somewhat selfishly attempting to nullify his own habitual and lifelong indebtedness. Wagner had in fact published a poem entitled “Die Not”⁹⁷ only a month previously (March 1849) in Röckel’s

⁹⁵ Wagner, “The Revolution.”

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ “Necessity.”

Volksblätter that proclaimed in Feuerbachian terms the fundamental *necessity* of the destruction of greed, usury, and capital.⁹⁸

Wagner also makes use of death-life imagery, suggesting that in revolution there is somehow an assurance of immortality. The stranglehold of finance is the reign of a dead object (literally metal) over the fundamentally living nature of humanity. The power of money over men and the power of monarchical authority of the people are conflated. The same is true of the law, the true essence of which is the external manifestation of the individual's internally-arrived at free will, rather than any imposed strictures. It is not argued that the abrogation of these oppressive conditions requires revolution; this is assumed. Wagner instead attempts to identify revolution with the authentic experience of human life itself; these concepts are not causative of one another but rather are one selfsame reality.

The idea of man as a God unto himself, in Feuerbach's anthropological sense of divinity, is strongly expressed. Since the revolution represents actualized human happiness, and is declared to be "der einige Gott," it is clear that man himself is this same sole God. Wagner thus concludes:

In godlike ecstasy they leap from the ground; the poor, the hungering, the bowed by misery, are they no longer; proudly they raise themselves erect, inspiration shines from their ennobled faces, a radiant light streams from their eyes, and with the heaven-shaking cry *I am a Man!* the millions, the embodied Revolution, the God become Man, rush down to the valleys and plains, and proclaim to all the world the new gospel of Happiness.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Mark Berry, *Treacherous Bonds and Laughing Fire: Politics and Religion in Wagner's Ring* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2006), 40, and Reinhold Brinkmann, *Late Idyll: The Second Symphony of Johannes Brahms*, trans. Peter Palmer, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 51.

⁹⁹ Wagner, "The Revolution." "In göttlicher Verzückung springen sie auf von der Erde, nicht die Armen, die Hungernden, die vom Elende Gebeugten sind sie mehr, stolz erhebt sich ihre Gestalt, Begeisterung strahlt von ihrem vereitelten Antlitz, ein leuchtender Glanz entströmt ihrem Auge und mit dem himmelschütternden Rufe: *ich bin ein Mensch!* stürzen sich die Millionen, die lebendige Revolution, der Mensch gewordene Gott, hinab in die Thäler und Ebenen, und verkünden der ganzen Welt das neue Evangelium des Glückes!"

Wagner is so enraptured in with his own revolutionary fervor that one half-expects him to conclude with “Nun volk, steh auf und Sturm brich los.”¹⁰⁰ Wagner’s revolution becomes the incarnation itself – “God become Man” – and a disparate people is unified in one spirit as “ein Mensch.” The redeemed multitudes here recall the various oppressed groups of Jesus’s Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount,¹⁰¹ “blessed” (μακάριοι) in their inheritance of the kingdom of heaven. For Wagner, this kingdom is a new social order on earth, which is accomplished through a liberating self-fulfillment – “the gospel of Happiness.” As we have seen, though, Wagner does not spare the oppressors, just as they are condemned to “woe” (ὄναι) in Jesus’s Sermon on the Plain.¹⁰² Wagner’s “Die Revolution” article ultimately bears a remarkable resemblance to the kind of self-liberating preaching which similarly preoccupies the protagonist of his *Jesus von Nazareth*.

Die Kunst und die Revolution

After his flight from Dresden following his participation in the failed uprising of May 1849, Wagner temporarily abandoned composing music (as he in any event initially had difficulty in getting his works produced during this time) and instead unleashed a torrent of theoretical essays that gave vent to his frustrated revolutionarism. These essays slightly postdate *Jesus von Nazareth* but are in much the same spirit of of that work.

¹⁰⁰ “Now people, rise up and storm break loose.” Originally found written as “Das Volk steht auf, der Sturm bricht los,” in Theodor Körner’s 1810 anti-Napoleonic poem “Männer und Buben;” later used in speeches by Hitler and Joseph Goebbels, most famously by the latter in his February 18, 1943 *Sportpalast* “Totaler Krieg” speech.

¹⁰¹ Matthew 5:3-12.

¹⁰² Luke 6:24-26.

Wagner, while still on the run from authorities following his flight from Saxony, penned a letter to Liszt on June 5, 1849, in which he proclaimed that “Geld habe ich nicht, aber ungeheuer viel Lust, etwas künstlerischen Terrorismus auszuüben,” and further entreated Liszt, “Gieb mir Deinen Segen, – oder nach besser: gieb mir Deinen Beistand!”¹⁰³ (Liszt would duly continue to aid in procuring performances of several of Wagner’s operas in the following years.)¹⁰⁴ In another letter to Theodor Uhlig, on September 18, 1850, Wagner concludes with an affirmation of “mein jetziger Unglaube an alle Reform und mein einziger Glaube an die Revolution.”¹⁰⁵ Wagner’s *Die Kunst und die Revolution* is the product of this frustrated revolutionary fervor from which he would attempt to find an outlet as an artistic *enfant terrible*.

In addition to what by now should be seen as Wagner’s standard refrain on the corrupting power of commerce, he presents an idealized portrait of Greek drama as the perfect artistic manifestation of its own cultural identity *in toto*, as “it was the nation itself—in intimate connection with its own history—that stood mirrored in its art-work, that communed with itself and, within the span of a few hours, feasted its eyes with its own noblest essence.”¹⁰⁶ Art has since fallen on hard times due to the rise of materialism and the modern propensity for

¹⁰³ “Money I have not, but an immense desire to create an artistic terrorism. Give me your blessing, or better still, give me your assistance.” Richard Wagner and Franz Liszt, *Briefwechsel zwischen Wagner und Liszt*, vol. 1, ed. Erich Kloss, (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel), 16, accessed November 27, 2013, books.google.com/books?id=gmlTAAAAQAAJ.

¹⁰⁴ This would include *Lohengrin*, premiered in Weimar on August 28, 1850, a date deliberately chosen by Liszt as the one hundred and first anniversary of Goethe’s birth.

¹⁰⁵ “...my current disbelief in all reform and my belief only in the revolution.” Wagner, *Richard Wagner’s Briefe an Theodor Uhlig*, Wilhelm Fischer, Ferdinand Heine, letter to Theodor Uhlig, no. 15, September 18, 1850, 58.

¹⁰⁶ Wagner, *Art and Revolution*, 52. It is difficult not to see the seeds of Nietzsche’s *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (*The Birth of Tragedy*) in Wagner’s idealization of the Athenian stage. (See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* [Leipzig: E. W. Fritsch, 1872], accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=VaA7AAAAAYAAJ>.)

superficial vulgarity. A revolution is thus required to return to the Greek ideal, and Wagner deems the musical theater to have strong potential for spearheading this social reorganization, since it is supposedly less susceptible to corruption by profit and wages.¹⁰⁷

Wagner denies the potential objection that his ideas may be utopian:

If history knows an actual Utopia, a truly unattainable ideal, it is that of Christendom; for it has clearly and plainly shown, and shows it still from day to day, that its dogmas are not realisable. How could those dogmas become really living, and pass over into actual life: when they were directed against life itself, and denied and cursed the principle of living? Christianity is of purely spiritual, and super-spiritual contents; it preaches humility, renunciation, contempt of every earthly thing; and amid this contempt—Brotherly Love! How does the fulfilment work out in the modern world, which calls itself, forsooth, a Christian world, and clutches to the Christian religion as its inexpugnable basis? As the arrogance of hypocrisy, as usury, as robbery of Nature's goods, and egoistic scorn of suffering fellow-men. Whence comes this shocking contradiction between the ideal and the fulfilment? Even hence: that the ideal was morbid, engendered of the momentary relaxing and enfeeblement of human nature, and sinned against its inbred robust qualities. Yet how strong this nature is, how unquenchable its ever fresh, productive fulness—it has shown all the more plainly under the universal incubus of that ideal; which, if its logical consequences had been fulfilled, would have completely swept the human race from off the earth; since even abstinence from sexual love was included in it as the height of virtue. But still ye see that, in spite of that all-powerful Church, the human race is so abundant that your Christian-economic State-wisdom knows not what to do with this abundance, and ye are looking round for means of social murder, for its uprootal; yea, and would be right glad, were mankind slain by Christianity, so only that the solitary abstract god of your own beloved *Me* might gain sufficient elbow-room upon this earth!¹⁰⁸

Wagner makes a somewhat similar sort of distinction between societally-derived Christendom and the true spirit of Christianity that was being made contemporaneously by Søren Kierkegaard, though without drawing the same conclusions therefrom. Wagner does not see much actual historical manifestation of true Christianity, though, unless one confines one's examination to the life of Jesus himself. This is the same motivating impetus behind *Jesus von Nazareth*. There is also the derision of egoism, taken to the absurd extremity that the ultimate expression of individual greed would require the elimination of the rest of humanity.

¹⁰⁷ Tamsin Shaw, *Nietzsche's Political Skepticism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), 41.

¹⁰⁸ Wagner, *Art and Revolution*, 59-60.

Wagner continues in this vein, strongly condemning what he sees as enslavement to the law of a life-denying theology:

Christianity adjusts the ills of an honourless, useless, and sorrowful existence of mankind on earth, by the miraculous love of God; who had not — as the noble Greek supposed—created man for a happy and self-conscious life upon this earth, but had here imprisoned him in a loathsome dungeon: so as, in reward for the self-contempt that poisoned him therein, to prepare him for a posthumous state of endless comfort and inactive ecstasy. Man was therefore bound to remain in this deepest and unmanliest degradation, and no activity of this present life should he exercise; for this accursed life was, in truth, the world of the devil, *i.e.*, of the senses; and by every action in it, he played into the devil's hands. Therefore the poor wretch who, in the enjoyment of his natural powers, made this life his own possession, must suffer after death the eternal torments of hell! Naught was required of mankind but *Faith*—that is to say, the confession of its miserable plight, and the giving up of all spontaneous attempt to escape from out this misery; for the *undeserved Grace* of God was alone to set it free.

The historian knows not surely that this was the view of the humble son of the Galilean carpenter; who, looking on the misery of his fellow-men, proclaimed that he had not come to bring peace, but a sword into the world; whom we must love for the anger with which he thundered forth against the hypocritical Pharisees who fawned upon the power of Rome, so as the better to bind and heartlessly enslave the people; and finally, who preached the reign of universal human love—a love he could never have enjoined on men whose duty it should be to despise their fellows and themselves. The inquirer more clearly discerns the hand of the miraculously converted Pharisee, Paul, and the zeal with which, in his conversion of the heathen, he followed so successfully the monition: “Be ye wise as serpents . . . ;”¹⁰⁹ he may also estimate the deep and universal degradation of civilised mankind, and see in this the historical soil from which the full-grown tree of finally developed Christian dogma drew forth the sap that fed its fruit. But thus much the candid *artist* perceives at the first glance: that neither was Christianity Art, nor could it ever bring forth from itself the true and living Art.¹¹⁰

Wagner clearly expresses strong doubt about the congruence of Christian doctrine with Jesus's teachings. In fact, it may be more accurate to say Wagner's own views are out of sync with Christian orthodoxy. He thus resorts to the time-tested rhetorical device of all Christian theorists: the appeal that his personal conception of Jesus as the truest expression of Jesus's own doctrine. Therein lay the necessity of creating a document such as *Jesus von Nazareth* to give full vent to Wagner's Jesus *qua* the product of his own self-rectitude.

¹⁰⁹ Matthew 10:16.

¹¹⁰ Wagner, *Art and Revolution*, 37-38.

Wagner's valorization of universal love is by no means unqualified. In a passage which recalls some of the ideas of Nietzsche's later *Zur Genealogie der Moral*,¹¹¹ Wagner asserts that true love lies in strength:

Only the *Strong* know *Love*; only *Love* can fathom *Beauty*; only *Beauty* can fashion *Art*. The love of weaklings for each other can only manifest as the goad of lust; the love of the weak for the strong is abasement and fear; the love of the strong for the weak is pity and forbearance; but the love of the strong for the strong is *Love*, for it is the free surrender to one who cannot compel us. Under every fold of heaven's canopy, in every race, shall men by real freedom grow up to equal strength; by strength to truest love; and by true love to beauty. But *Art* is *Beauty* energised.¹¹²

This is a curious assertion in light of Wagner's seemingly universal embrace of love in *Jesus von Nazareth*. Even there, however, he conceives of love as only truly realized when it is an active force; it is expressed through works and not mere contemplation alone. In this way can love still be considered to be a manifestation of strength. Wagner's artistic ideal therefore is ultimately found in a fusion of the Grecian and Christian spirits of strength and love:

Thus would *Jesus* have shown us that we all alike are men and brothers; while *Apollo* would have stamped this mighty bond of brotherhood with the seal of strength and beauty, and led mankind from doubt of its own worth to consciousness of its highest godlike might. Let us therefore erect the altar of the future, in *Life* as in the living *Art*, to the two sublimest teachers of mankind:—*Jesus, who suffered for all men; and Apollo, who raised them to their joyous dignity!*¹¹³

It is remarkable that *Die Kunst und die Revolution*, which was written nearly contemporaneously with *Jesus von Nazareth*, shares so many of the same tendencies as Wagner's 1880 *Religion und Kunst*, conventionally supposed to have represented an entirely different era in Wagner's thought. They both share a tension between Christianity and classical culture and a respect for Jesus specifically as a redemptive force. The subtleties of Wagner's interpretation of Jesus would change in later years, but his fascination with the man himself remained constant.

¹¹¹ *On the Genealogy of Morality*.

¹¹² Wagner, *Art and Revolution*, 57-58.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 65.

“Künstlerthum der Zukunft”

In case the depth of Wagner’s radicalism during the period of *Die Kunst und die Revolution* and *Jesus von Nazareth* period remains in question, any doubt should be dispelled by his fragmentary, unpublished essay “Artisthood of the Future,”¹¹⁴ which makes plain that his unorthodoxy extended even to language itself. Translator William Ashton Ellis, ever striving after literalism, retains Wagner’s lowercase for even proper nouns, explaining that “at this period (1849-1851) Wagner avoided *all* capital letters, out of rebellion against the German style of writing, where every noun begins with a capital,” and citing to that effect his correspondence with his musician-friend Theodor Uhlig.¹¹⁵ Wagner goes on to brainstorm on the subject of Christianity in a less than generous fashion. In a logically convoluted passage, he describes “christianity” [sic] as a necessary error, in a progressive sense, proceeding, much like science, through negation. While the influence of Hegelianism is obvious, Wagner proceeds to equate error with temporality and truth with eternity; art is “the active energy of truth” and is therefore eternal.

Another correspondence between “Artisthood of the Future” and *Jesus von Nazareth* can be found in their similar fixation on the idea of the *Volk*, which in its most abstract sense could be thought of as a given community of men:

From error sprang science: but the error of the greek philosophers had not strength enough to slay itself; the great folk’s-error of christianity first had the prodigious ponderance to slay itself. Here, too, the folk is the determinant force. [sic]¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ The title of this work recalls Wagner’s well-known essay, *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, and may indeed have been a preparatory exercise in the latter’s creation. Additionally, both contain frequent reference to the “Volk” as the wellspring of art.

¹¹⁵ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth and Other Writings*, 345.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 350.

It is not entirely clear what Wagner intended with this passage, or with the document as a whole, but it is clear that Wagner appreciated the self-sacrificial message of Christianity, particularly as embodied by Christ. The description of Christianity as a “folk’s error” seems to demonstrate a genuine atheism at this stage in Wagner’s development. However, given his valorization of the power of the collective will of the people, Christianity must have still had some validity since it was the creation of this selfsame popular will. As we have seen, its alleged erroneousness was for Wagner at this time a necessary development on the path to truth.

Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft

Wagner is reported to have quipped, “My baton will yet become the scepter of the future. It will teach the times what course they must take.”¹¹⁷ It was in this sort of spirit that *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*,¹¹⁸ dedicated to Feuerbach, was written in 1849; indeed, the essay would come to haunt Wagner, as his opponents could tar him as a self-righteous and self-appointed aesthetic prophet. Biographer Ernest Newman has also detected a certain correspondence in it to Feuerbach’s prose style; furthermore, he asserts, both men were “constitutionally prone to the antithetical.”¹¹⁹ In addition to advancing his theory of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*,¹²⁰ or the complete, integrative work of art, which had first been seen in *Die Kunst und die Revolution*, Wagner particularly excoriates what he detects as egoism among the individual arts, which in Wagner’s

¹¹⁷ Qtd. in Leon Stein, *The Racial Thinking of Richard Wagner* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), 118.

¹¹⁸ *The Artwork of the Future*.

¹¹⁹ Ernest Newman, *The Life of Richard Wagner: Volume II, 1848-1860*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, 431.

¹²⁰ The actual term (which Wagner spelled *Gesamtkunstwerk*) does not appear to have been coined by Wagner, but is first found in Karl Friedrich Eusebius Trahdorff’s 1827 *Ästhetik oder Lehre von Weltanschauung und Kunst*. There is no evidence that Wagner ever encountered this work.

mind were originally unified. Furthermore, this egosim extends to modern society as a whole, which, though it “dubs itself ‘Brotherly-’ and ‘Christian-’ ‘Art-’ and ‘Artist-Love,’” is in fact desperate to conceal its all-consuming individualistic egotism, whose motto “follows the inversion of the teaching of Jesus Christ: ‘To *take* is more blessed than to give.’”¹²¹ Wagner would prominently feature the original formulation of this maxim in *Jesus von Nazareth*, biblically attributed to Jesus in Acts 20:35. Wagner asserts that the ultimate abrogation of man’s egoism is to be found in his death:

The last, completest renunciation (*Entäusserung*) of his personal egoism, the demonstration of his full ascension into universalism, a man can only show us by his *Death*; and that not by his accidental, but by his *necessary* death, the logical sequel to his actions, the last fulfilment of his being.

The celebration of such a Death is the noblest thing that men can enter on. It reveals to us in the nature of this one man, laid bare by death, the whole content of universal human nature.¹²²

It is difficult not to see an allusion to the salvific death of Jesus in this passage, particularly given that Wagner had written *Jesus von Nazareth* less than a year prior to this essay. A performance of *Jesus von Nazareth* itself could indeed have been considered the actualization of a noble “celebration” of such a death for which Wagner calls. It would function as a secularized liturgy in parallel to traditional worship. “The whole content of human nature” would, one might imagine, be particularly revealed in the simultaneously divine nature of Jesus fully made manifest in the sacrificial character of his death. Wagner indeed comes very close to advocating the enactment of a new religious ritual of his own creation:

Not in the repulsive funeral rites which, in our neo-christian [sic] mode of life, we solemnise by meaningless hymns and churchyard platitudes; but by the artistic re-animation of the lost one, by life-glad reproduction and portrayal of his actions and his death, in the dramatic Art-work, shall we celebrate that festival which lifts us living to the highest bliss of love for the departed, and turns his nature to our own.¹²³

¹²¹ Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future*, 99.

¹²² Ibid., 199.

¹²³ Ibid.

In conjunction with its artificial abeyance of death, another of egoism's most powerful fallacies is its insistence on materialism: "This loathly care about the Future, which indeed is the sole heritage of moody, absolute Egoism, at bottom seeks but to *preserve*, to *ensure* what we possess to-day, for all our lifetime. It holds fast to Property—the to-all-eternity to be clinched and riveted, *property*—as the only worthy object of busy human forethought."¹²⁴

Wagner diagnoses the degeneration of artistic unity in much the same fashion as he had in *Die Kunst und die Revolution*, and he again connects the process to the rise of Christianity. One paradox of Christianity for Wagner is the unfulfilment that he finds in religious faith and its requisite de-emphasis of this present life:

The *Christian* left the shores of Life.—Farther afield, beyond all confines, he sought the sea,—to find himself at last upon the Ocean, twixt sea and heaven, boundlessly alone. The *Word*, the word of *Faith* was his only compass; and it pointed him unswervingly toward Heaven. This heaven brooded far above him, it sank down on every side in the horizon, and fenced his sea around. But the sailor never reached that confine; from century to century he floated on without redemption, towards this ever imminent, but never reached, new home; until he fell a-doubting of the virtue of his compass, and cast it, as the last remaining human bauble, grimly overboard. And now, denuded of all ties, he gave himself without a rudder to the never-ending turmoil of the waves' caprice. In unstilled, ireful love-rage, he stirred the waters of the sea against the unattainable and distant heaven: he urged the insatiate greed of that desire and love which, reft of an external object, must ever only crave and love itself,—that deepest, unredeemable hell of restless Egoism, which stretches out without an end, and wills and wishes, yet ever and forever can only wish and will itself,—he urged it 'gainst the abstract universalism of heaven's blue, that universal longing without the shadow of an 'object'—against the very vault of absolute un-objectivity. (Bliss, unconditioned bliss,—to gain in widest, most unbounded measure the *height of bliss*, and yet to stay completely *wrapt in self*: this was the unallayable desire of Christian passion.) So reared the sea from out its deepest depth to heaven, so sank it ever back again to its own depths; ever its unmixed self, and therefore ever unappeased,—like the all-usurping, measureless desire of the heart that ne'er will give itself and dare to be consumed in an external object, but damns itself to everlasting *selfish solitude*.¹²⁵

Wagner's reference to the "the Word" in this passage is also not related to the Johannine λόγος, but rather to the spoken word as a distinct artform which Christianity overemphasizes at the expense of integrative artistic universality. His overall conception is one of a frustrated life of

¹²⁴ Ibid., 206.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 113-114.

faith that finds the only recourse to its disappointment to lie in a turning-inward upon itself, thus again fulfilling Wagner's repetitive refrain of "egoism." In any event, the obvious redressment of this situation for Wagner lies in the transference of unobtainable, transcendent divinity to the present life of man, an idea made plain in his *Jesus von Nazareth*'s omission of the supernatural resurrection in favor of a revolutionarily actualized paradise on earth.

"The Unbeauty of Civilization"

Wagner had at one point intended to write a never-completed essay to be called "The Unbeauty of Civilization."¹²⁶ The title alone is telling. It would have essentially comprised a stinging indictment of "the law," in a similar vein to that which we have seen in *Jesus von Nazareth*. According to Magee, the law would be described as an inevitably imposed construct, artificial and thus objectionable:

No matter how good the intentions of the law-imposers, no matter how non-violent and consensual their methods, no matter if everything they did were aimed, and aimed successfully, at promoting civilization, law imposition must inescapably involve self-imposition; and the self-imposition of any natural beings on the rest of Nature, including on one another, could only be an affront whose consequences would be life-inhibiting if not life-destroying.¹²⁷

As always with Magee, one must factor in his own sympathetically pro-Wagnerian and Schopenhauerian-tinged outlook. However, in framing his opposition as against "civilization," Wagner does in fact put himself in line with the valorization of "Nature" present in many of his later works. It must be pointed out that such an analysis of the inevitability of conflict between existing beings is certainly in line with Schopenhauer's own philosophy, but it is not at all clear, at least from the fragmentary evidence that we have for Wagner's "Unbeauty" essay, how the

¹²⁶ The title in English translation recalls Sigmund Freud's 1930 *Civilization and Its Discontents*, originally known as *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*. To some extent, the themes of the two works overlap as well. Freud's work, however, takes the notion of *homo homini lupus*, discussed below, as its basic assumption.

¹²⁷ Magee, 111.

composer proposed to either avoid such apparently life-intrinsic imposition or to make it life affirming.

That Wagner's negative rebuke takes the form of the concept of "unbeauty" reinforces the notion that he tended to view all of life through an aesthetic lens. Civilization is not described as logically impossible, immoral, soulless, or otherwise materially untenable, but rather as simply not beautiful. Since the civilization in which man is entrapped is an aesthetic disaster, man's redemption therefrom must needs also be accomplished through aesthetic means. And in Wagner's mind, who would be better to accomplish this redemption than Wagner himself? *Jesus von Nazareth* represents one of the composer's attempts at conveying such an aestheticized redemptive message.

Das Judenthum in der Musik

Wagner's most notorious anti-Semitic work is the much-analyzed *Das Judenthum in der Musik*, known in translation as *Judaism* (but more accurately *Jewishness*) *in Music*. It is remarkable for the extent to which Wagner's personal bitterness against individual Jews¹²⁸ is transmogrified into an abstracted, generalist denunciation. It was originally published pseudonymously in September 1850 (and expanded under Wagner's own name in 1869),¹²⁹ and

¹²⁸ E.g., against, Giacomo Meyerbeer, whose success Wagner had resented during his bohemian years as a "starving artist" in Paris, despite Meyerbeer's generous assistance to him during that time. (See Magee, 344-353.) Wagner had also submitted his youthful Symphony in C to Mendelssohn for performance, but the work was for whatever reason misplaced, contributing to Wagner's resentment. Peter Mercer-Taylor, *The Life of Mendelssohn*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 143.

¹²⁹ Richard Wagner, *Judaism in Music*, in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, vol. 3, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1894), accessed November 27, 2013, <http://users.belgacom.net/wagnerlibrary/prose/wagjuda.htm>, Richard Wagner, *Das Judenthum in der Musik* (Leipzig: J. J. Weber, 1869), accessed November 27, 2013, http://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Das_Judenthum_in_der_Musik_%281869%29, and Richard Wagner, *Some Explanations Concerning "Judaism in Music,"* in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, vol. 3, trans. William Ashton

its bearing on *Jesus von Nazareth* is indirect at best. Its primary utility for the present study lies in its relation to Wagner's attempt to separate Jesus from his Jewish origins. One of Wagner's main claims in *Judenthum* is his assertion that the alleged musical infacility of the Jews derives from their inability to properly pronounce European languages – described as “a creaking, squeaking, buzzing snuffle” (“ein zischender, schrillender, summsender und murksender Lautausdruck”) and “an intolerably jumbled blabber” (“eines unerträglich verwirrten Geplappers”) – which consequently wreaks havoc on the ur-music of song.¹³⁰ For Wagner, “Song is just Talk aroused to highest passion: Music is the speech of Passion” (“Leidenschaft”).¹³¹ This clearly refers to passion in the sense of emotion and not to the suffering of Christ. However, given his views on the inherent unmusicality of Jewish speech, it is perhaps possible to discern another motivation for Wagner's exclusion of the Old Testament from his scriptural compilation in *Jesus von Nazareth*. Given this mindset, it would have been contradictory for Wagner to base a libretto intended to be sung from a Hebrew-derived text, quite apart from his general Jewish antipathy. Furthermore, the overall sense one gets from Wagner's *Judenthum* is of the Jews as, at best, pale imitators of the higher elements of civilization, and as at worst, parasitical. Wagner phrases this in linguistic terms: “when we hear this Jewish talk, our attention dwells involuntarily on its repulsive *how*, rather than on any meaning of its intrinsic *what*.”¹³² This distinction is particularly reminiscent of the approach to the law developed in

Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1894), accessed November 27, 2013, <http://users.belgacom.net/wagnerlibrary/prose/wagjuda2.htm>.

¹³⁰ Wagner, *Judaism in Music*, 85, and Wagner, *Das Judenthum in der Musik*, 15.

¹³¹ Wagner, *Judaism in Music*, 86, and Wagner, *Das Judenthum in der Musik*, 16.

¹³² Wagner, *Judaism in Music*, 85.

Jesus von Nazareth; Jesus is concerned with its true fulfillment (which for Wagner is in fact largely its jettisoning), and thus its intrinsic nature, while the Jewish Pharisees seek only to apply the letter of its outward forms. It also goes without saying that Wagner expresses the same materialist denunciations in *Judenthum* as he would in *Jesus von Nazareth*, though here he more closely aligns money and power.¹³³

Das Liebesmahl der Apostel

Approximately five years before his drafting of *Jesus von Nazareth*, Wagner composed a piece for male chorus and orchestra known as *Das Liebesmahl der Apostel* (literally: *The Apostles' Love-Meal*, idiomatically: *The Feast of Pentecost*).¹³⁴ It concerns the initially-dejected gathering of the Apostles after the crucifixion, and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The composition had ironically been in part inspired by Wagner's hearing of Mendelssohn's oratorio *Paulus*,¹³⁵ conducted by Mendelssohn himself, an ironic outcome given Wagner's aforementioned outward antipathy toward the composer and toward the oratorio as a form.

Wagner, in his autobiography *Mein Leben*, later described his reaction to the performance of *Das Liebesmahl* thusly:

¹³³ "According to the present constitution of this world, the Jew in truth is already more than emancipated: he rules, and will rule, so long as Money remains the power before which all our doings and our dealings lose their force. That the historical adversity of the Jews and the rapacious ravenness of Christian-German potentates have brought this power within the hands of Israel's sons—this needs no argument of ours to prove." (Wagner, *Judaism in Music*, 81.)

¹³⁴ Richard Wagner, "Sketch for *The Apostles' Love Feast*," in *Jesus of Nazareth and Other Writings*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 277-282. Ashton Ellis dates Wagner's prose sketch to April 21, 1843 and reports the premier of the finished work in the Dresden *Frauenkirche* on July 7, 1843. The piece's title had provisionally been *Das Gastmahl der Apostel*.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 278-279. In English, *St. Paul*.

I was astonished by the comparatively feeble effect produced upon my ear by this colossal mass of human bodies. This experience convinced me of the inherent foolishness of such gigantic choral undertakings, and produced in me a decided antipathy to concerning myself with them in any way in the future.¹³⁶

The huge scale of the musical forces involved derived from the fact that *Das Liebesmahl* was performed by a massive ensemble of “all the male-voice choral societies in Saxony.”¹³⁷ This in fact comprised a reputed total of almost 1,300 singers and instrumentalists. Nevertheless, the episode is emblematic of Wagner’s changing approach to the production of religious art. The solemnity and unity of choral declamation would appear to be an appropriate medium for liturgical singing, both in symbolic and practical terms. However, it leaves little room for individual characterization or plot development, and thus is dramatically “flat.” Just as Wagner would eventually come to the conclusion that the opera generally, and even his own previous Romantic operas, had, as a form, degenerated into a “concert in costume,”¹³⁸ and had thus become musically dead, to be redeemed only by his own integrative and self-proclaimedly innovative “music drama,” he could likewise see the need to revitalize religious music along the same terms.¹³⁹ Indeed, even in *Das Liebesmahl* itself, though his commission was for a completely choral work, Wagner attempted to manipulate the scoring to produce a more emotive effect on the audience:

I decided that the monotony of such choral singing, which the orchestra would only enliven to a slight extent, could be made bearable solely through the introduction of some dramatic elements

¹³⁶ Wagner, *My Life* (1983), 258.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 257.

¹³⁸ Qtd. in Henry Theophilus Finck, *Wagner and His Works: The Story of His Life with Critical Comments*, vol. 1, 7th ed. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1907), 177, accessed November 27, 2013, books.google.com/books?id=X-csAAAAYAAJ.

¹³⁹ This emphasis on the dramatic elements of opera can, however, be traced back at least to Christoph Willibald Gluck in the late eighteenth century, if not earlier. See Patrick Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 4-5.

... and executed it in such a way that the whole thing could be sung by various groups in turn, completely avoiding any real solo parts in accordance with the dictates of the situation.¹⁴⁰

The movement toward defined characterization and humanely affective plot structures in religious works and away from strictly liturgical development is thus apparent, pointing toward the entirely dramatic structure to be found in *Jesus von Nazareth*.¹⁴¹

Das Liebesmahl strongly emphasizes the sense of communitarianism and anti-materialism that is likewise found in *Jesus von Nazareth*, as the Apostles proclaim, “Unite where’er ye meet; in common be your goods!” and, “Let each man bear the Saviour in his heart; then, what though scattered, shall we be *one* flock.”¹⁴² This is contrasted with a pronouncement of doom on those who would oppress: “Lo the proud mistress of the world! Lo Rome!”¹⁴³ Though Wagner based his text on the fourth chapter of Acts, it is paraphrased in such a way that presages the same sort of scriptural manipulation in which he would latterly engage in *Jesus von Nazareth*. Emblematic of this is Wagner’s transformation of Acts 4:32 from the Bible’s declarative statement that goods were held in common into a command to do so, thus replacing voluntary charity with mandatory social reorganization. Both the Greek sources and Luther’s translation, on which Wagner relied, are in agreement on this particular, as are other scriptural

¹⁴⁰ Wagner, *My Life* (1983), 257. (Wagner spoke truly concerning this “monotony,” as *Das Liebesmahl* progresses for about twenty-four minutes, approximately three-fourths of its total duration, before the orchestra is even heard from at all.)

¹⁴¹ Wagner is reputed to have ultimately characterized *Das Liebesmahl* not in musical terms but instead as “a sort of folkloric miracle play.”

¹⁴² Wagner, “Sketch for *The Apostles’ Love Feast*,” 281-282. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 282.

passages which discuss the same topic, but this does not prevent Wagner from misusing the same verse in the same fashion in *Jesus von Nazareth*.¹⁴⁴

It is further striking how *Das Liebesmahl* functions almost as a diegetic sequel or peroration to *Jesus von Nazareth*, in that the former work finds the Apostles, now with disciples of their own, seemingly in the same abandoned state as they had been following the death of Christ in *Jesus von Nazareth*, only to again be buoyed to enthusiasm, this time by the arrival of the Holy Spirit and the initiation of the Great Commission.

The choruses of *Das Liebesmahl* also bear a strong resemblance to those in *Jesus von Nazareth*'s ultimate successor work, *Parsifal*, particularly in the overlapping melodies of their choral groupings (and indeed in the physical arrangement of the singers, with provision made in both works for voices emanating vertically from heights above the audience), though there is a heavy difference in subtlety and musical complexity that is primarily compensated for by bombast.¹⁴⁵ The dramatic context of the choruses is also similar in that they involve, both in *Parsifal*'s third and first Acts, the assuagement of a troubled group of believers through Eucharistic ritual and the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a voice or voices from above. This provides some evidence that, had Wagner ever managed to fully compose *Jesus von Nazareth*, or had sufficiently extensive musical sketches survived, its musical idiom may have evoked a sound-world somewhere in between *Das Liebesmahl* and *Parsifal*, though, since these works were written at opposite ends of his career, one must be circumspect in this speculation.

¹⁴⁴ Richard Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, in *Jesus of Nazareth and Other Writings*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 338. Cf., e.g., Acts 2:44

¹⁴⁵ Palant also asserts (62) that Wagner “reused some of the voices from this earlier composition” in *Parsifal*, in addition to noting similarities in the physical layout of their singers.

Rienzi

Wagner's opera *Rienzi*, which was first performed in 1842, forms something of an opposed counterweight to *Jesus von Nazareth* in terms of its thematic content, though similarities are also apparent. Its titular hero leads a political revolution which is initially supported by the established Church, whereas Jesus's spiritual revolution is opposed by the existing religious authorities. Both protagonists do share the fate of death as the result of the malfeasance of the mutable popular will.¹⁴⁶ Both works also are comprised of a five-act structure. But the contrast between the political and spiritual foci of *Rienzi* and *Jesus von Nazareth*, and their shared formal and thematic structures, seems to suggest that even at the height of his presumably "revolutionary" phase, which surrounded the general European upheaval of 1848, Wagner was in *Jesus of Nazareth* already undertaking the inward, spiritual turn which would characterize the redemptive impulse of his mature operas. It is indeed possible that Wagner's creative capacity for this sort of youthful "opera of revolution" had been exhausted in *Rienzi*. His ensuing artistic bankruptcy in this regard may account for his inability to bring *Jesus of Nazareth* to fruition as a completed work, and necessitated the abandonment of its religious themes until, following Wagner's turn from political revolution and toward the internal revolution of Schopenhaurian *Mitleid* ("fellow suffering;" i.e., compassion) some of its components could resurrected in the transmuted form of *Parsifal*.

¹⁴⁶ *Rienzi* is ironically reputed to be the opera which inspired a youthful Adolf Hitler's political ambitions. See August Kubizek, *The Young Hitler I Knew*, trans. Geoffrey Brooks (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2011), 116-119.

Tannhäuser and Lohengrin

Wagner's 1845 *Tannhäuser und der Sängerkrieg auf Wartburg* explores many of the same questions of redemption to be found in *Jesus von Nazareth*. Until his final opera *Parsifal*, *Tannhäuser* would remain Wagner's work most obsessively focused on sin, guilt, and redemption therefrom, and it is unique among Wagner's operas in mentioning Jesus by name.¹⁴⁷ *Tannhäuser* is also Wagner's most theologically Protestant work, as its plot culminates in the symbolic divine forgiveness of its dying eponymous protagonist, who had previously been denied absolution by the Pope himself, who, however, is not explicitly named, but referred to as "ihn, durch den sich Gott verkündigt."¹⁴⁸ Reminiscent of Jesus's bypassing of the legalistic doctrines of the Pharisees, Tannhäuser is saved not by "den dürren Stab in Priesters Hand," – the barren staff in a priest's hand – but by rather by "der Gnade Heil"¹⁴⁹ – the salvation of grace – mediated by the redemptive love of his departed Elisabeth. Tannhäuser is indeed torn between the sensual love of Venus and the purity of the virginal Elisabeth, recalling the Madonna-whore dichotomy of *Jesus von Nazareth*.¹⁵⁰ In that work, Wagner in fact appears to transfer this struggle away from the contrast of Mary the mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene, and into an internal conflict within the character of Mary Magdalene herself. In addition to this shared emphasis on redemptive love, the shared anti-clericalism of *Jesus von Nazareth* and *Tannhäuser*

¹⁴⁷ In the *Pilgerchor* (Pilgrim's Chorus) of Act I, the prayer "Zur dir wall ich, mein Jesus Christ, der du des Pilgers Hoffnung bist!" is sung. Richard Wagner, *Tannhäuser und der Sängerkrieg auf Wartburg* (Berlin: Adolph Fürstner, 1868), 69, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=hmt5dbye2LwC>.

¹⁴⁸ "...him through whom God proclaims himself." (Ibid., 262.) In the original legend of Tannhäuser from which Wagner worked, this is reputed to be Pope Urban IV, though there is no definitive historical basis for this.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 283 and 285.

¹⁵⁰ This complex was first identified by Sigmund Freud in "Über die allgemeinste Erniedrigung des Liebeslebens," *Jahrbuch für Psychoanalytische und Psychopathologische Forschungen*, vol. 4, 40–50.

is confirmed throughout Wagner's writings to be a generally-held sentiment. The confining strictures of institutionalized religion differed little through the centuries from Moses to the Papacy, and indeed the structures of sacred authority were nigh-indistinguishable from their secular counterparts. In Rome, "all the monuments there bore witness to infamous and enslaved human beings from the Roman emperors to the Jesuit churches and cardinals' palaces."¹⁵¹ This church abrogated all salvific potential unto itself, "as if it were a sort of magic, as if the pope had the means of getting us to heaven one way or another."¹⁵² This view of a unified sense of historical repression could only be rectified by a revolutionary mechanism of individual liberation, a worldview which Wagner would find percolating in the radical intellectual currents surrounding him.

Wagner had completed *Lohengrin* shortly before writing *Jesus von Nazareth*, but the two works share little in the way thematic correspondences, other than an indirect connection to the plot of *Parsifal*. Lohengrin, the opera's titular Swan Knight protagonist, and the son of the Grail-guardian Parzival (Wagner later changed the spelling), is in some sense a Christ-like figure in his redemptive effect and transitory appearance, and disappearance motivated by betrayal, but he is not so much of a sacrificial figure and perhaps better approximates the Holy Spirit rather than Jesus – though he does enter – and exit – miraculously. The opera in any event is more focused on a characterological exploration of epistemology and justice than religious or political themes. Wagner himself compared its plot to the myth of Zeus and Semele.¹⁵³ As was his usual practice,

¹⁵¹ Qtd. in Aberbach, 255.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Olin Chism, "The Creation of *Lohengrin*," accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.playbillarts.com/features/article/6025-The-Creation-of-Lohengrin.html>. Zeus's dalliance with Semele, though fatal to the mortal woman, nevertheless, in some versions of the myth, resulted in the birth of Dionysus.

Wagner wrote the libretto for *Lohengrin* in 1845, years before he completed its composition, and before he had become radicalized to the extent seen in *Jesus von Nazareth*. Had *Jesus von Nazareth* been composed, however, it is safe to assume that its music would have been somewhat reminiscent of Wagner's contemporaneous style in *Lohengrin*, though with the caveat that all of Wagner's operas constitute remarkably independent and self-contained sound-worlds.

It should also be noted that Wagner's original prose draft of *Siegfrieds Tod* (*Siegfrieds Death*, which would eventually become the basis for the *Gotterdammerung* component of the *Ring* cycle) was written shortly before he began work on *Jesus von Nazareth*.¹⁵⁴ However, the works frankly do not resemble each other in the slightest, and attempts to portray Wagner's Jesus as a sort of Christian Siegfried would likely prove fruitless. Indeed, Carl Friedrich Glasenapp notes the strong contrast between the two dramas: the timing of Wagner's initiation of *Jesus von Nazareth* makes it seem "as if its author at once had recognised the impossibility of his solitary attempt to compass 'redemption' by means of a light-hearted egoist" – i.e., the naïve character of Siegfried himself.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Carl Friedrich Glasenapp, *Life of Richard Wagner*, vol. 3, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1903), 330, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=JecsAAAAYAAJ>.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

Chapter 3: Contemporary Intellectual Influences

“The original sin of all Germans: speculative philosophy.”¹⁵⁶

Eduard Hanslick, the Viennese music critic who would go on to become among the greatest of Wagner’s artistic detractors, had already accused the composer of this “sin” of philosophizing in 1847. Perhaps more charitably, one could cite Wagner’s own estimation of the inward-looking and end-in-itself-seeking nature of the German character, which, in the theatrical realm, he contrasts with utilitarianism: “Here came to consciousness and received its plain expression, what *German* is: to wit, the thing one does for its own sake, for very joy of doing it.”¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless, Wagner was indeed under the sway of a variety of contemporary left-wing intellectuals at the time of his composition of *Jesus von Nazareth*. Most of these are treated in great detail by Paul-Gerhard Graap (discussed below), as the analysis of these influences forms the primary thrust of his study of *Jesus von Nazareth*, rather than the working-out of the document itself. Some further examination will be made here.

Hegel, Schelling, and Fichte

The philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel dominated the intellectual milieu of Wagner’s Europe. Hegel was himself strongly interested in theological themes, having originally studied as a seminarian, and a good deal of his thought concerns an attempt at the integration and

¹⁵⁶ Qtd. in Joachim Köhler, *Richard Wagner: The Last of the Titans*, trans. Stewart Spencer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 259.

¹⁵⁷ Wagner, *German Art and German Policy*, 107. Cf. Adolf Hitler’s speech of March 20, 1936: “I need the German people in the struggle that I carry on for its own sake.” (Adolf Hitler, *My New Order*, ed. Raoul de Roussy de Sales [New York: Octagon Books, 1973], 183.)

amalgamation of philosophy and religion into a unified account of the unfolding of *Geist*, alternatively translated as “spirit” or “mind.”¹⁵⁸ It is known that Wagner read Hegel’s masterwork, the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*,¹⁵⁹ during his Dresden years which preceded *Jesus von Nazareth*, and in fact hyperbolically praised Hegel’s infamously abstruse tome as “the best book ever published.”¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, we also find the source of this remark, Wagner’s friend Friedrich Pecht, elsewhere describing an episode in which he and Wagner were confounded and indeed hilariously baffled by the difficulties of the *Phänomenologie*.¹⁶¹ Despite this, Wagner comments that regarding Hegel’s philosophy of history, “the more incomprehensible many of his speculative conclusions appeared, the more I felt myself desirous of probing the question of the ‘Absolute’ and everything connected therewith to the core. For I so admired Hegel’s powerful mind that it seemed to me he was the very keystone of all philosophical thought.”¹⁶² Indeed, Wagner went on to read Hegel’s *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*¹⁶³ a short time later, which in part reinforced his conception of conflict – and thus possibly also of revolution – as an inherent historical process. Indeed, in Wagner’s essay *Religion und Kunst*, written several decades later, we find him bemoaning “attack and defence, want and war, victory and defeat, lordship and thralldom, all sealed with the seal of blood: this from henceforth is the

¹⁵⁸ In Hegel’s system, philosophy is ultimately placed on a higher plane of development than religion.

¹⁵⁹ *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

¹⁶⁰ Qtd. in Köhler, 259.

¹⁶¹ Qtd. in Köhler, 259, and Glasenapp, vol. 3, 21.

¹⁶² Richard Wagner, *My Life*, vol. 1, trans. anonymous (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1911), 521, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=5V0pAAAAYAAJ>.

¹⁶³ *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*.

History of Man,”¹⁶⁴ which strongly recalls the description of “History as the slaughter-bench at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of States, and the virtue of individuals have been victimised” in Hegel’s *Vorlesungen*.¹⁶⁵ Nevertheless, Wagner was at that point most likely envisioning historical futility in terms of the dour philosophical system of Schopenhauer rather than that of Hegel, who in any event saw historical violence as a merely a means in the unfolding development of freedom.

Hegel was particularly concerned with the individual person of Jesus. In 1795 he had even written his own retelling of the Gospels, *Das Leben Jesu*.¹⁶⁶ Additional important early works in this vein include Hegel’s *Die Positivität der christlichen Religion* (1795) and his *Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal* (1796).¹⁶⁷ While all of these youthful works remained in manuscript form until being published in the twentieth century, they nevertheless exercised an indirect influence on Wagner, as they initiated the evolution of Hegel’s thought concerning Jesus that would inform his mature works to which Wagner had access.

¹⁶⁴ Wagner, *Religion and Art*. 228.

¹⁶⁵ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hi/>, “III. Philosophic History. ii. Essential Destiny of Reason, (2) The Means Spirit Uses to Realise Its Idea, § 24.”

¹⁶⁶ *Life of Jesus*. See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Das Leben Jesu: Harmonie der Evangelien nach eigener Übersetzung. Nach der ungedruckten Handschrift in ungekürzter Form*, ed. Paul Roques (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1906), accessed November 27, 2013, http://openlibrary.org/books/OL23381268M/Das_Leben_Jesu, and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Life of Jesus, in Three Essays, 1793-1795*, ed. and trans. Peter Fuss and John Dobbins (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1984), 104-165.

¹⁶⁷ *The Positivity of the Christian Religion and The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*. See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften: nach den Handschriften der Kgl. Bibliothek in Berlin*, ed. Herman Nohl (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1907), and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *On Christianity: Early Theological Writings by Friedrich Hegel*, trans. T. M. Knox and Richard Kroner (New York: Harper, 1948), accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/94356418/Hegel-Early-Theological-Writings>.

Hegel's *Leben Jesu* is subtitled "a harmonization of the Gospels,"¹⁶⁸ which implies an assumption on Hegel's part that like other retellings of Christ's life, his unified rationalization of the Gospels is justified by its function as a synthetic whole superior to the sum of its parts. Wagner could perhaps sustain the same argument in dramatic terms with *Jesus von Nazareth*. In reality, both works are more concerned with using Jesus as a means to the achievement of their own rhetorical purposes by means of εἰσήγησις (eisegesis – "leading into") rather than "drawing out" the meaning of the texts through ἐξήγησις (exegesis). In point of fact, Hegel's Jesus can be seen as a projection of his own self-appointed youthful vocation as a *Volkserzieher*, or popular philosophic educator.

Both Hegel's and Wagner's Jesus eschew supernatural salvation, and neither mention the virgin birth. Like Wagner, Hegel entirely ignores what is arguably the kernel of the Christian faith, Jesus's resurrection.¹⁶⁹ The primary aims of the *Leben Jesu* are to portray Christianity as both a *Vernunftreligion* and a *Volksreligion*, that is, a religion grounded in reason, which for Hegel at this stage meant Kantianism, but also springing from the living spirit of the people, as ancient Greek culture supposedly had.¹⁷⁰ (Hegel was, like Wagner, a philhellene, and he elsewhere lamented destruction of organic mythologies by the grafting-on of trans-cultural religions, observing that "Christianity has emptied Valhalla.")¹⁷¹ Hegel's Jesus is a purveyor of

¹⁶⁸ "Harmonie der Evangelien."

¹⁶⁹ For example, Hegel goes so far in his attempt to scientize Jesus that he even describes the water mixed with blood that flowed from his side when he was pierced after being crucified as "lymphatic fluid" ("eine Lymphe"), a dubious conclusion from the modern medical perspective. Hegel, *The Life of Jesus*, 165, and Hegel, *Das Leben Jesu*, 74.

¹⁷⁰ See Glenn Mason-Riseborough, "On Hegel's *The Life of Jesus*," accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.geocities.ws/griseborough/30.htm>, and George Plimpton Adams, *The Mystical Element In Hegel's Early Theological Writings* (Berkeley: The University Press, 1910), 76-81.

¹⁷¹ G. R. G. Mure, "Review of *Hegel's Early Theological Writings*," *Philosophy*, vol. 25, no. 95 (Oct., 1950): 353, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3747544>.

Kantian ethics whose miracles are in fact metaphorical expositions of his doctrines, and like Wagner's Jesus, he is in some sense a manifestation of the spirit of the *Volk*,¹⁷² as both Hegel and Wagner array Jesus in opposition to the Pharisees, whose "positive" (i.e., historically determined) religion Hegel contrasts with Jesus's universal rational truths.¹⁷³ His Jesus "needed no plaudits, no external authority to believe in reason."¹⁷⁴ Rationality indeed entirely supplants faith, as "pure reason, transcending all limits, is divinity itself."¹⁷⁵ However, while Wagner's Jesus certainly purports to be rational, Hegel's emphasis on the moral law is incongruous with Wagner's antinomianism; nor is the philosopher's Jesus imbued with Wagner's overweening emphasis on love or antimaterialist humility. Hegel's Jesus proclaims that "this inner law is a law of freedom to which a person submits voluntarily, as though he had imposed it on himself. It is eternal, and in it lies the intimation of immortality," a pronouncement whose conflation of deontological ethics and the soul would sound entirely out of place among the Feuerbachian precepts of Wagner's Jesus.

Hegel's *Leben Jesu* also strikes a rather more condemnatory tone toward the Jews than does *Jesus von Nazareth*, a somewhat surprising discovery considering the strength of Wagner's

¹⁷² Cf. Hegel's "Tübingen Essay," sometimes known as "On the Prospects for a Folk Religion," in *Three Essays, 1793-1795*, ed. and trans. Peter Fuss and John Dobbins (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1984), 30-58, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/pc/tubingen.htm>.

¹⁷³ The similarity of Kant's Categorical Imperative to Jesus's Golden Rule is so widely remarked that the former is often taken to be a largely a secularized rationalization of the latter.

¹⁷⁴ Hegel, *The Life of Jesus*, 107.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 104. This is the opening sentence of Hegel's work and it explicitly functions as his interpretation of John's concept of λόγος. In short, Hegel entirely conflates λόγος with reason, stripping the term of all of its mystical connotations.

counter-Hebraic reputation.¹⁷⁶ However, Hegel and Wagner do share a certain dynamic in which their religious beliefs are informed by anti-Semitism, and vice versa. This is particularly apparent in another of Hegel's theological treatises, *Der Geist des Christentums und sein Schicksal*, in which Jesus stands entirely apart from the Jews, who come under direct and sustained attack for their bifurcation of the universal and the particular, that is, of law and life, and of God and man.¹⁷⁷ Hegel writes in a well-known passage:

The great tragedy of the Jewish people is no Greek tragedy; it can rouse neither terror nor pity, for both of these arise only out of the fate which follows from the slip of a beautiful character; it can arouse horror alone. The fate of the Jewish people is the fate of Macbeth who stepped out of nature itself, clung to alien Beings, and so in their service had to trample and slay everything holy in human nature, had at last to be forsaken by his gods (since these were objects and he their slave) and be dashed to pieces on his faith itself.¹⁷⁸

Though this level of vituperativeness certainly matches Wagner's mature anti-Semitic works, it is not present to the same degree in *Jesus von Nazareth*. It does, however, capture *Jesus von Nazareth's* argument that slavish adherence to the law is inevitably self-defeating.¹⁷⁹ Most importantly, though, Hegel and Wagner share the sentiment that Christianity as Jesus formulated it by no means derived evolutionarily from Judaism, but instead arose in antithetical opposition thereto. Like Wagner, Hegel also heavily emphasizes the centrality to Jesus's message of the

¹⁷⁶ E.g., Hegel relates that since Jesus "was keenly aware of the Jews' national attachment to deep-rooted prejudices and their lack of a sense for anything higher than this, he did not seek closer dealing with them or place much confidence in their conviction. On the whole he did not deem them capable of such, did not believe them to be cut from a cloth from which something greater could be fashioned." (Hegel, *The Life of Jesus*, 107.)

¹⁷⁷ Paul A. Kottman, ed., *Philosophers on Shakespeare* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 7, and Mure, 353-354.

¹⁷⁸ Qtd. in Kottman., 47.

¹⁷⁹ Hegel was by this point (1799) post-Kantian and had consequently dropped his previously single-minded valorization of Kantian duty and moral legislation as an insufficient ethical framework.

necessity of a community built on love.¹⁸⁰ Love as described in Jesus's Sermon on the Mount¹⁸¹ is "the fusion of law and inclination." It is "meant to overcome the abstract form of theories of moral law, without transgressing the content of that law."¹⁸² Hegel sees love as expressed by the early Christians as incompatible with modernity, however, due to the development of "reflective rationality and its expression in private property," which are antagonistic to the unity required by love.¹⁸³ Although this awareness of the effects of property-holding does appear to echo Wagner's anti-materialist concerns, Hegel, unlike Wagner, does not polemicize against this state of affairs or call for a return to an idealized primitive Christianity, instead merely presenting his findings as detached analysis.

Hegel's *Positivität der christlichen Religion* had previously explored the way by which Christianity had devolved from a religion of free virtue to structured legalism. In the same manner that Wagner would eventually come to describe, Hegel attributes this phenomenon in part to the corrupting influence of Judaism, to which Catholicism had been particularly susceptible. However, Jesus himself bears some responsibility, as he had to appeal to the "formalistic and servile" Jewish religion in order to spread his sect.¹⁸⁴ This is also the origin of Hegel's bemoaned "positivity" in Christianity, since Jesus "could not wholly avoid the substitution of his own authority for the free dictates of the individual conscience."¹⁸⁵ Wagner's

¹⁸⁰ Alice Ormiston, "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate: Towards a Reconsideration of the Role of Love in Hegel," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 35, no. 3 (Sep., 2002): 499, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3233113>.

¹⁸¹ Matthew 5-7.

¹⁸² Ormiston, 511.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 516.

¹⁸⁴ Mure, 353.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

own philosophizing, anti-authoritarian Jesus could be seen as an attempt at a corrective to this development.

Aside from Hegel's specific doctrines, what Wagner seems to have absorbed most strongly from the philosopher is a penchant for generalized abstraction. Hegel has a habit of deeply layering theory upon theory, to the point that a foundational grounding in concrete reality is, at best, obscured; as a point of criticism, this tendency has remained a focus among his opponents. Wagner seized upon this as a sort of official imprimatur that gave an intellectually respectable license to his own opacities. Wagner's erstwhile protégé Friedrich Nietzsche was among those who would diagnose this origin of the composer's obscurantist predilections:

In the words of Nietzsche, who was the first to point out the "deep significance" of the fact that "the emergence of Wagner coincides with the emergence of the Reich:" "Let us recollect that Wagner was young when Hegel and Schelling led men's minds astray; that he found out, that he grasped firmly what only a German takes seriously - the 'Idea,' that is to say something obscure, uncertain, mysterious."¹⁸⁶

Given the mention of Friedrich Schelling, it must be said that Wagner's understanding of the works of this contemporary of Hegel was in fact minimal. Wagner relates that he procured Schelling's *System des transcendentalen Idealismus*,¹⁸⁷ "but it was in vain that I racked my brains to try and make something out of the first pages."¹⁸⁸ At any rate, this took place slightly after his drafting of *Jesus von Nazareth*, though still in 1849.

Consideration of Schelling also raises the issue of whether or not Wagner was under the influence of the philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte. At first glance, Fichte's post-Kantian idealist system has many congruencies with Wagner's own interests, including emphases on the

¹⁸⁶ Christina von Braun and Anja Belz, "Richard Wagner: A Poisonous Drink," *New German Critique* no. 69, Richard Wagner (Autumn, 1996), 51, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/488607>.

¹⁸⁷ *System of Transcendental Idealism*.

¹⁸⁸ Wagner, *My Life* (1911), 521.

fundamentally social basis of individual freedom (which Fichte saw as the precondition for realized self-consciousness), a strong sense of German nationalism tinged with Francophobia and anti-Semitism, and decidedly heterodox religious beliefs. In the latter case, Fichte associated the identity of God as present in the concept of morality itself rather than as a distinct being.¹⁸⁹ Fichte also produced a detailed exposition of the Gospel of John (the same Gospel favored by Wagner), and particularly of its cryptic yet critically-important prologue, in *Die Anweisung zum Seligen Leben*;¹⁹⁰ Fichte in fact considered the fourth Gospel to be “the only true source of the genuine doctrine of Christ.”¹⁹¹

Wagner does not mention Fichte in *Mein Leben* or in his more readily-accessible letters, but Cosima does recount that Wagner, regarding Goethe, “can understand his dislike of Fichte and says with regard to ideality: ‘It is exactly the same as with the valve trumpet – hardly was this facility discovered when all melodies were played with it. The same with ideality: hardly had Kant discovered it when everybody started making nonsense of it.’”¹⁹² Since Wagner, like

¹⁸⁹ John McClintock and James Strong, *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, vol. 3 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1891), 542-545, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=b6Dzw6ULQqMC>.

¹⁹⁰ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Die Anweisung zum Seligen Leben*, ed. Fritz Medicus (Hamburg: Meiner, 1954), 88-103 and 180-186.

¹⁹¹ McClintock and Strong, 545.

¹⁹² “Ideality” here refers to the Immanuel Kant’s philosophy of transcendental idealism and the school of German idealists (including Hegel, Schelling, and Fichte) who followed him. The modern valve trumpet was perfected during the course of Wagner’s lifetime. Cos. Diar. vol. 2, Friday, October 31, 1879, p. 388. Fichte was from 1793-1799 employed at the University of Jena, over which Goethe wielded “immense power” as a state minister in Weimar-Sachsen. Foster comments that Goethe “preferred to study not the subjective mind, but objective nature. As such, Goethe revered the ‘holy Spinoza’ and read Kant only with great difficulty. And although Goethe was responsible for Fichte’s hiring, Fichte’s thought repelled him in a number of ways. Not only was Fichte a poor writer, but his system was an abstract subjective philosophy which deprivileged nature. Goethe and Schiller both enjoyed poking fun at Fichte’s ideas.” (Ryan J. Foster, *The Creativity of Nature: The Genesis of Schelling’s Naturphilosophie, 1775--1799*, [ProQuest, UMI Dissertation Publishing, 2011], 244. Foster himself cites Eckart Förster, “‘Da geht der Mann dem wir alles verdanken!’ Eine Untersuchung zum Verhältnis Goethe-Fichte,” *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 45 (1997): 331-45.)

Goethe,¹⁹³ emphasized the importance of “nature” (a common if ill-defined concept in nineteenth-century thought, prominent in the *Naturephilosophie* of Schelling and forseen by Johann Gottfried von Herder) over and against the pure abstraction of thinkers like Fichte, the latter’s influence on Wagner should further be considered questionable. However, Wagner’s biographer Glasenapp takes considerable pains to describe what he regards as the important formative influence of Wagner’s intellectually-oriented uncle Adolf on him during his childhood, a fact which Glasenapp relates as eventually acknowledged by Wagner himself (Wagner lived with his uncle in Leipzig beginning in 1828).¹⁹⁴ Adolf Wagner attended Fichte’s lectures in Jena before the latter’s dismissal due to his alleged atheism, and Glasenapp calls Fichte Adolf’s “much-prized teacher;” though at the same time, “A. Wagner gave more importance to private studies and the vital stimulus of personal intercourse, than to attendance at academic lectures.”¹⁹⁵ The nature of this indirect Fichtean connection to the composer is therefore not entirely clear and a determination of its relative merit is left to the reader’s discretion.

In the period after *Jesus von Nazareth*, Wagner would ostensibly come to eventually reject Hegel after encountering Hegel’s great ideological nemesis, Schopenhauer, confiding to his second wife Cosima that both Hegel and Schelling were “nothing but charlatans.”¹⁹⁶ He would go on to describe Hegel’s thought as “a system which has succeeded in so incapacitating German brains for grasping the mere problem of Philosophy, that it has since been accounted the

¹⁹³ Foster, 244; see discussion in note above.

¹⁹⁴ Carl Friedrich Glasenapp, *Life of Richard Wagner*, vol. 1, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1900), 17, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=k-YsAAAAYAAJ>.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 19.

¹⁹⁶ Qtd. in Köhler, 259.

correct philosophy to have no philosophy at all.”¹⁹⁷ Glasenapp, in obvious accord with the sympathies of his biographical subject, makes this explicit in describing how Schopenhauer’s philosophy, though slow (and perhaps conspiratorially so) in gaining academic acceptance, “throws the Fichte-Schelling-Hegel bosh and charlatanism completely overboard.”¹⁹⁸ In any event, Wagner primarily came into contact with Hegel’s ideas through one branch of his intellectual progeny, the so-called Young, or Left, Hegelians,¹⁹⁹ who attempted to remove Hegel’s idealized *Geist* from the realm of spirit and into the applicability of material history.²⁰⁰

Feuerbach

Among the Young Hegelians, Wagner owed his greatest debt to Ludwig Feuerbach. Wagner himself acknowledges this, and Feuerbach’s influence on the composer is a heavily-analyzed phenomenon, particularly with regard to Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. *Jesus von Nazareth* is also a particularly Feuerbachian work. Feuerbach’s fame rests largely on his origination of one key assertion: that God did not create man, but rather man created God. Feuerbach develops this argument in his 1841 *Das Wesen des Christentums*, which Wagner in *Mein Leben* mentions having encountered while in Dresden, where he qualifies Feuerbach as

¹⁹⁷ Qtd. in Glasenapp, vol. 3, 21. Glasenapp cites Wagner’s 1867 *German Art and German Policy*. In the essay in question, however, Hegel is not explicitly mentioned, as Wagner merely refers to “a philosophic system once nursed in Berlin, and now brought into thorough world-renown under the famous name of German Philosophy.” (Wagner, *German Art and German Policy*, 53.) However, translator William Ashton Ellis identifies this as Hegel’s philosophy, and it is difficult to disagree with him.

¹⁹⁸ Carl Friedrich Glasenapp, *Life of Richard Wagner*, vol. 6, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1908), 22, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=fkAQAAAAYAAJ>.

¹⁹⁹ William J. Brazill, *The Young Hegelians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 14.

²⁰⁰ Cf. Wagner biographer Max Koch’s judgment: “...*disciplinam philosophicam, quam Hegelius condidit, critice enarrabit.*” (Max Koch, *Richard Wagner*, vol.1 [Berlin: Ernst Hofmann & Co., 1907], 106.)

having been described to him by a former theology student as “the sole adequate philosopher of the age.”²⁰¹ Wagner goes on to describe how he “always regarded Feuerbach as the ideal exponent of the radical release of the individual from the thralldom of accepted ideas.”²⁰² Some scholars also believe that Wagner may have discovered Feuerbach during his earlier Parisian years. In any event, Wagner’s deepest study of the *Wesen* (and also of Feuerbach’s *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft*,²⁰³ whose title obviously inspired Wagner’s own *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, which is in fact dedicated to Feuerbach) actually occurred after his flight from Dresden in 1849, and thus also after his drafting of *Jesus von Nazareth*.²⁰⁴

Nevertheless, it appears that Wagner had at least some familiarity with Feuerbach prior to beginning *Jesus von Nazareth*. Westernhagen puts forth the argument that assertions of Feuerbach’s influence “in *Jesus von Nazareth* or even in the articles published in Röckel’s *Volksblätter* are refuted in the first place by Wagner’s own account of his reading of Feuerbach and above all by the total absence of any of his works from the Dresden library.”²⁰⁵ As it turns out, “Wagner’s own account” in *Mein Leben* does not in fact refute the notion that he was aware of Feuerbach prior to his escape from Dresden – though Wagner does seem to contradict himself. While discussing the dying stages of the Dresden revolt, Wagner mentions “a certain Menzdorff, a German Catholic priest whom I had had the advantage of meeting in Dresden. (It was he who,

²⁰¹ Qtd. in Magee, 51.

²⁰² Qtd. in *ibid.*, 51-52. See also Wagner, *My Life* (1911), 522.

²⁰³ *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*.

²⁰⁴ Magee, 50-51.

²⁰⁵ Westernhagen, 145.

in the course of a significant conversation, had first induced me to read Feuerbach.)”²⁰⁶ Wagner does later relate his increasing interest in Feuerbach during his Dresden exile, where his friend Wilhelm Baumgartner presented the composer a copy of the philosopher’s first book, the 1830 *Gedanken über Tod und Unsterblichkeit*,²⁰⁷ which largely anticipates the direction of the *Wesen*, and denies the possibility of personal immortality in favor of an immortality through one’s reunification with nature through death, along the lines of Spinoza. (Somewhat surprisingly, while Wagner praises Feuerbach’s “stirring lyrical style,” presumably in reference to the *Gedanken*, he admits more difficulty in following the *Wesen*, lamenting the “prolix and unskilful [sic] manner in which he [Feuerbach] dilates on the simple and fundamental idea, namely, religion explained from a purely subjective and psychological point of view,” though this should not overshadow Wagner’s overall admiration for the philosopher at this time.)²⁰⁸ In any event, Wagner himself describes his initial acquaintance with Feuerbach as actually predating these encounters; as the questions raised by the philosopher “had often occupied my mind since the very first days of my acquaintance with Lehrs in Paris, just as they occupy the mind of every imaginative and serious man.”²⁰⁹ “Lehrs” here is Samuel Lehrs, an impoverished German-Jewish philologist with whom Wagner describes having “one of the most beautiful friendships of my life.”²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ Wagner, *My Life* (1911), 492. Menzdorff is later described as “formerly a divinity student ... who used to wear a Calabrian hat. (521)”

²⁰⁷ *Thoughts on Death and Immortality*.

²⁰⁸ Wagner, *My Life* (1911), 522.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 521.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 210.

The problem the exact dates of Wagner's drafting of *Jesus von Nazareth* is also unclear; some commentators, such as Solomon Guhl-Miller, see Wagner as having completed the outlines of the work in Dresden; subsequent to his flight therefrom, however, he is said to have reintegrated newly-acquired or newly-emphasized Feuerbachian (and Proudhonian) ideas into the work later in 1849.²¹¹ The evidence cited for this assertion is Wagner's letter from Zurich to Ferdinand Heine of November 19, 1849, in which he briefly considers the means by which *Jesus von Nazareth* could be brought to the Parisian stage via the assistance of a French poet, identified by editors Spencer and Millington as Gustave Vaëz. Wagner relates that "I shall spend the next few days elaborating my sketch for there;²¹² it is: *Jesus of Nazareth*."²¹³ However, in the first instance, it is not clear what this elaboration would have consisted of in either its methods or extent, had Wagner indeed engaged in it. Given the context of the remark, it is very possible that Wagner's elaboration may have consisted of consideration of changes that would be required for a Parisian performance, as the Paris *Opéra*, in particular, had exacting traditional formal requirements, including the provision of a second act ballet.²¹⁴ (It is somewhat difficult to see how such a ballet could have been included in a work like *Jesus von Nazareth* in a non-ludicrous

²¹¹ Solomon Guhl-Miller, "The Path of Wagner's Wotan: German Idealism, Wagner's Prose Writings, and the Idea of Moral Progress," (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2012), 267, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/963973095>.

²¹² I.e., Paris.

²¹³ Wagner, *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, letter to Otto Wesendonck, circa January 5, 1857, no. 196, 177-178.

²¹⁴ E.g., see the disastrous 1861 Paris premiere of Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, in which the composer's addition of a ballet in the first act offended sensibilities of the aristocratic Jockey Club, who customarily dined during the first act of a performance. The resulting intolerable jeering that the club instigated caused Wagner to withdraw the work after only three performances.

manner.)²¹⁵ In the second instance, it is doubtful that Wagner engaged in significant further post-Dresden revisions of *Jesus von Nazareth* at all. Spencer and Millington are unequivocal in this regard, appending the following footnote to Wagner's stated intention of further elaboration: "There is no evidence that Wagner did so."²¹⁶ And in the final analysis, the strongest argument to be made for the influence of Feuerbach on *Jesus von Nazareth* is the content of the document itself, which is so clearly shot through with Feuerbachian themes as to make the philosopher's imprint unmistakable.

To return to Feuerbach's philosophy itself, it could be summed up thusly: "The beginning, middle and end of religion is MAN."²¹⁷ The kernel of his "anthropological essence of religion" is that God is the outward projection of man's inward nature; since, as he puts it, "religion is the consciousness of the infinite; hence it is, and cannot be anything other than, man's consciousness of *his* own essential nature."²¹⁸ The various aspects of God are in fact derivative of man's own character. Crucially, however, Wagner agrees with Feuerbach that despite all of its inadequacy of perspective, religion is not something to be merely dismissed out of hand. Rather, it has fundamental truths to impart to us; it is just that these truths are ultimately actually about ourselves.²¹⁹ Indeed, Feuerbach expresses what could be called the motto of the *Wesen* in this manner: "*Homo homini Deus est*: – this is the great practical principle: – this is the

²¹⁵ However, *Jesus von Nazareth* is conceived in the five-act structure of the French grand opera tradition, and some of its several large crowd scenes could possibly be choreographed in an abstract manner.

²¹⁶ Wagner, *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, letter to Otto Wesendonck, circa January 5, 1857, no. 196, 177.

²¹⁷ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot, "Chapter XVIII. The Christian Heaven, or Personal Immortality," accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/feuerbach/works/essence/>.

²¹⁸ Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, "§1 The Being of Man in General."

²¹⁹ See further Magee, 52-54.

axis on which revolves the history of the world ... all the moral relations are *per se* religious. Life as a whole is, in its essential, substantial relations, throughout of a divine nature.”²²⁰ Needless to say, Feuerbach rejects on a chapter-by-chapter basis the validity of most of the tenets of orthodox Christianity, including the Trinity, the virgin birth, prayer, *ex nihilo* creation, the resurrection, miracles in general, and the sacraments. Wagner’s *Jesus von Nazareth* omits nearly all of these in its plot, implying that Wagner wished to convey an implicit rather than explicit sense of their rejection before his potential audience, perhaps to minimize any offense given. Wagner’s fully-displayed antinomianism in *Jesus von Nazareth*, is, however, evidence at least of his concurrence with Feuerbach’s invalidation of the sacraments, though the Eucharist specifically had and would continue to take on important symbolic overtones in works like *Das Liebesmahl* and *Parsifal*.

Feuerbach’s *Grundsätze* resembles his *Wesen* in much of its content, opening with the assertion that “the task of the modern era was the realisation and humanisation of God – the transformation and dissolution of theology into anthropology.”²²¹ Feuerbach and Wagner agree that Protestantism has done a better job of humanizing God than Catholicism, as indeed

²²⁰ “Man is a god to man.” (Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, “Chapter XXVII. Concluding Application.”) Cf. Seneca’s “Homo homini res sacra” (“Man is a sacred thing to man”) in Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.intratext.com/X/LAT0230.HTM>, Epistula XCV, 33, and Plautus’s “Lupus est homo homini, non homo, quom qualis sit non novit” (“One man to another is a wolf, not a man, when he doesn’t know what sort he is.”) in *Asinaria*, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0031%3A>. Thus Hobbes, in *De Cive*: “To speak impartially, both sayings are very true; That Man to Man is a kind of God; and that Man to Man is an errant Wolfe. The first is true, if we compare Citizens amongst themselves; and the second, if we compare Cities.” (accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/en/decive.htm>.) Erasmus, in the *Adagia*, comments on the Greek version, “Ἀνθρώπος ἀνθρώπου δαιμόνιον”: “To be a god, thought the ancients, was simply and solely to be of value to mortal men; thus the ancient world made gods out of the originators of wine, laws, anyone who had contributed to the betterment of life.” (Desiderius Erasmus, *The Adages of Erasmus*, ed. William Barker, [Toronto, Ont.: University of Toronto Press, 2001], 38.)

²²¹ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Principles of Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Zawar Hanfi, “Part I: History of Modern Philosophy, § 1,” accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/feuerbach/works/future/>.

Protestantism “has ceased to be *theology* – it is essentially *Christology*; that is, *religious anthropology*.”²²² However, Protestantism still continues to view God as a “transcendent being or a being that will one day become an object *for man* up there in heaven.”²²³ Wagner’s depiction of Jesus in *Jesus von Nazareth* echoes Feuerbach’s own solution to this problem: “that which is *other-worldly* to religion, is *this-worldly* to philosophy; what does not constitute an object for the former, does so precisely for the latter.”²²⁴

Feuerbach also heavily stresses the metaphysical significance of love:

The new philosophy bases itself on the *truth of love*, on the *truth of feeling*. In love, in feeling in general, *every human being confesses to*, [sic] *the truth of the new philosophy*. As far as its basis is concerned, the new philosophy is nothing but *the essence of feeling raised to consciousness* – it only affirms in the form and through the medium of reason what every man – every real man – admits in his heart. It is the heart made aware of itself as reason. The heart demands *real and sensuous objects, real and sensuous beings*.²²⁵

Feuerbach also claims in the *Wesen* that our conception that “God is love”²²⁶ is a reflection of the absolute centrality of love to the human condition; likewise, any notion of the incarnation is an expression of our own love for the concept of God – and thus, of course, for ourselves.²²⁷ Feuerbach furthermore emphasizes throughout his works the importance of what he calls the “I–Thou” relationship, in which every person has an instinctual desire to enter into in unity with another.²²⁸ This comes across as a sort of upending of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic. In

²²² Ibid., “§ 2, Protestantism.”

²²³ Ibid., “§ 3.”

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Feuerbach, *Principles of Philosophy of the Future*, “Part III: Principles of the New Philosophy, § 34.”

²²⁶ 1 John 4:8, “ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν.”

²²⁷ Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, “Chapter IV. The Mystery of the Incarnation; or, God as Love, as a Being of the Heart.”

²²⁸ Julian Young, “Richard Wagner on the Way We are Now,” 3, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://users.wfu.edu/caron/ssrs/Young.docx>.

Feuerbach's bond of love, "essence becomes object of essence, essence touches essence, and in this unity of essence, the separated individual and particular being of both of you disappear with all distinctions and divisions in and between you."²²⁹ Finally, in Feuerbach's conception of salvation, it is love that is decisive rather than God:

Who then is our Saviour and Redeemer? God or Love? Love; for God as God has not saved us, but Love, which transcends the difference between the divine and human personality. As God has renounced himself out of love, so we, out of love, should renounce God; for if we do not sacrifice God to love, we sacrifice love to God, and in spite of the predicate of love, we have the God—the evil being—of religious fanaticism.²³⁰

Feuerbach noticeably does not mention Jesus in this passage concerning redemption. We can easily see, then, how Wagner's own Jesus in *Jesus von Nazareth* is strongly identified as the personification of love, and love itself is assigned an intrinsically liberating essence. This hypertrophied formulation of love permeates all of Wagner's operas and indeed his own life in both an abstract and an erotic sense.

In addition to Feuerbach's anthropogenic conception of God and the primary role he assigns to love, Wagner absorbed a few other doctrines for Feuerbach that were part and parcel of the Young Hegelian school in general. One of these, shared with Hegel, was the conception of history as unfolding according to a logical and discernible meaning; a corollary to that shared by Wagner shared was an optimism that this historical movement was in a fundamentally positive direction. Unlike Hegel, however, Feuerbach and his ilk were proponents of metaphysical or ontological materialism, which demanded that sensibility be a condition of reality, and dispensed with Hegel's notion of *Geist*. As Marx famously realized, Feuerbach stood Hegel on his head in

²²⁹ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Thoughts on Death and Immortality from the Papers of a Thinker, along with an Appendix of Theological-Satirical Epigrams, Edited by one of his friends*, trans. James A. Massey (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 38.

²³⁰ Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, "Chapter IV. The Mystery of the Incarnation; or, God as Love, as a Being of the Heart."

this regard.²³¹ Wagner would concur, stating “that alone is true ... which is sensible and obeys the conditions of sensibility.”²³² It should be noted that other than in this connection, references to Wagner’s anti-materialism throughout this thesis are intended to refer to economic materialism, or what is now called anti-consumerism, or simply greed. The Wagner of the era of *Jesus von Nazareth* was clearly, however, also a materialist in the ontological sense of the word. Wagner does nevertheless allow his Romantic sensibilities enough leeway to make periodic references to the “spirit” of various phenomena, a viewpoint that is not entirely out of accord with the notion of spirit as merely the concatenation of the material. Wagner’s perception of ontological materialism would change fairly decisively, though, following his discover of Schopenhauer, whose entire philosophy is predicated on the existence of a fundamentally unapproachable noumenal substratum. Schopenhauer himself would argue that “materialism is the philosophy of the subject who forgets to take account of himself.”²³³

One additional overlap in Feuerbach’s and Wagner’s thinking is in the area of anti-Semitism. It should be said that Feuerbach is considered to on the whole be fairly even-handed in his treatment of Judaism.²³⁴ However, in one chapter of the *Wesen*, he asserts that the idea of creation is “the fundamental doctrine of the Jewish religion,” and he does not view this doctrine

²³¹ “It was Feuerbach, not Marx, who first stood Hegel on his head.” (Duncan B. Forrester, *Forrester on Christian Ethics and Practical Theology: Collected Writings on Christianity, India, and the Social Order* [Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2010], 337.)

²³² Qtd. in Young, 2-3.

²³³ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Philosophical Writings: Arthur Schopenhauer*, ed. Wolfgang Schirmacher (New York: Continuum, 1994), 59.

²³⁴ *Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution*, vol. 1, ed. Richard S. Levy (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2005), s.v. “Feuerbach, Ludwig (1804-1872),” 226, and Marx W. Wartofsky, *Feuerbach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 319.

positively. Creation, for Feuerbach means the unacceptance of nature as it is and instead the mongering after its control:

Utilism is the essential theory of Judaism. The belief in a special Divine Providence is the characteristic belief of Judaism; belief in Providence is belief in miracle; but belief in miracle exists where Nature is regarded only as an object of arbitrariness, of egoism, which uses Nature only as an instrument of its own will and pleasure. Water divides or rolls itself together like a firm mass, dust is changed into lice, a staff into a serpent, rivers into blood, a rock into a fountain; in the same place it is both light and dark at once, the sun now stands still, now goes backward. And all these contradictions of Nature happen for the welfare of Israel, purely at the command of Jehovah, who troubles himself about nothing but Israel, who is nothing but the personified selfishness of the Israelitish people, to the exclusion of all other nations, – absolute intolerance, the secret essence of monotheism.²³⁵

Wagner's own use of "egoism" as a rhetorical brickbat echoes this passage, as does his valorization of nature and his eventual bifurcation of Jehovah from the Christian God. Feuerbach goes on to contrast the relatively refined sensibilities of the Greeks with the essentially "alimentary view of theology" held by the Jews; i.e., their concern with legalism in matters of diet, which is again in line with Wagner's antinomianism. However, Feuerbach ultimately does not see a great difference between Judaism and Christianity, as in the following chapter of the *Wesen* he defines Christianity as "spiritual Judaism ... purified from national egoism ... As in Jehovah the Israelite personified his national existence, so in God the Christian personified his subjective human nature, freed from the limits of nationality."²³⁶

Unlike Wagner, Feuerbach was not generally politically involved. This did not stop the composer from attempting to express Feuerbach's philosophy in the political principles of *Jesus von Nazareth*. As Shaw has pointed out, the naturalistic reduction of theology and metaphysics to anthropology does not in itself abrogate "theistic dogmas," but requires a fundamental reorientation of religious feeling which could not consist of the "merely superficial artistic

²³⁵ Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, "Chapter XI. The Significance of the Creation in Judaism."

²³⁶ Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, "Chapter XII. The Omnipotence of Feeling, or the Mystery of Prayer."

manipulation of people’s emotions,” but rather demanded “radical social transformation. It was an inherently political endeavor. The significance of art had to lie in its congruence with political objectives.”²³⁷

Bauer

Several of the Young Hegelians exercised a lesser influence on Wagner. One of these was Bruno Bauer, who, though he shared many interests with Wagner, is not known to have been much-read by the composer. The strongest connection between the two actually exists indirectly via Nietzsche, who youthfully sought out Bauer as a mentor in a similar fashion to his discipleship under Wagner.²³⁸ Though Bauer is best remembered today for his strident anti-Semitism, he devoted most of his career to a stream of monographs which progressively deconstruct the New Testament and ultimately argue that the historical Jesus was in fact a literary fiction, the cumulative product of a broad conspiratorial concatenation created by its author(s) from “the ideas of Seneca, the stoics, Philo, Judaism, Hellenism, heathenism, [and] Josephus.”²³⁹

Wagner does not mention Bauer (or his fellow radicals Max Stirner and Arnold Ruge) in *Mein Leben*. Bauer is discussed, much later in Wagner’s life, in the diaries of his wife Cosima. This consists of a series of remarks in which Wagner concurs with Bauer’s extolling of German

²³⁷ Shaw, 41.

²³⁸ Nietzsche produced polemics against David Friedrich Strauss at Bauer’s suggestion, and at one point referred to Bauer as “my entire reading public.” (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, ed. Walter Kaufmann [Random House: Vintage Books Edition, 1989], 278.)

²³⁹ Brazill, 206.

virtue over and against the Catholics,²⁴⁰ the Jesuits (due to the Germans' supposed relative unconcern with the afterlife, since they "have always carried their Valhalla deep in their hearts"),²⁴¹ and the Jews.²⁴² Bauer was an acquaintance of Hans von Bülow, Wagner's conductor friend (and Cosima's ex-husband) in the 1850s in Berlin,²⁴³ and Bauer did publish an article in the Wagnerian-mouthpiece *Bayreuther Blätter* in 1881.²⁴⁴ All of this indicates that Wagner did have some familiarity with Bauer's works, but it unclear how early this was the case.

Bauer delighted in critical contrarianism for its own sake, and his inveighing against "the terrorism of pure theory"²⁴⁵ to some extent recalls Wagner's own aforementioned desire to create a transformative alternative in the form of "artistic terrorism." Bauer in fact transitioned from a conservative Hegelian who had criticized D. F. Strauss's *Leben Jesu* to a radical whom Arnold Ruge would characterize as "the Robespierre of theology."²⁴⁶ The two works of Bauer's most likely to have influenced Wagner in *Jesus von Nazareth* are his 1841 *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte der Synoptiker*²⁴⁷ and his 1843 *Die Judenfrage*.²⁴⁸ Bauer's anti-Semitism was, like Wagner's, in part a function of his philhellenism, and in *Die Judenfrage* he argues that political

²⁴⁰ Cosima Wagner, *Cosima Wagner's Diaries*, vol. 2, 1878-1883, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack, trans. Geoffrey Skelton (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), entry of Monday, June 26, 1882, 880.

²⁴¹ Cosima Wagner, vol. 1, entry of Saturday, October 4, 1873, 682-683.

²⁴² Cosima Wagner, vol. 2, entry of Friday, February 11, 1881, 620-621.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1108.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, entry of Monday, November 28, 1881, 755.

²⁴⁵ D. Rjazamov and V. Adoratski, eds., *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe* (Berlin: Marx-Engels-Verlag, 1927-32), Bauer to Marx, March 28, 1841, part 1, vol. 1, section 2, 247.

²⁴⁶ Arnold Ruge, *Arnold Ruges Briefwechsel und Tagebuchblätter aus den Jahren 1825 – 1880*, ed. Paul Nerrlich (Berlin: Weidmann, 1886-1887), Arnold Ruge to Ludwig Ruge, September 26, 1842, vol 1., 281.

²⁴⁷ *Critique of the Evangelical History of the Synoptic Gospels.*

²⁴⁸ *The Jewish Question.*

emancipation of the Jews would be illogical without the concurrent abolition of religion, which should not and in fact cannot simultaneously exist therewith in a secularized political environment. The negative portrayal of pharisaical authority in *Jesus von Nazareth* can to some extent be taken to constitute a related rejection on Wagner's part of such "political" Judaism. Bauer's primary complaint against Judaism, however, was its profession of the "absolute otherness of God,"²⁴⁹ a position anathema to the Young Hegelian anthropogenized view of Godhood, which Wagner at this time shared. Bauer's 1841 *Kritik* argues for Markan priority, but conceives of that Gospel as only a literary account and of Jesus as merely the product of its author's desire for a human Messiah, a concept, he claims, that Judaism had previously considered only abstractly.²⁵⁰ Similarly, but in contrast to what will be shown to be Wagner's favoritism to that Gospel, Bauer had previously rejected the book of John as entirely unhistorical in his 1840 *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte des Johannes*.²⁵¹

Stirner

Max Stirner was the pseudonym of Johann Kaspar Schmidt. The true extent of Stirner's influence on Wagner is unclear; Welsh, for one, asserts that the evidence only rises to the level of "considerable suspicion,"²⁵² though Gregor-Dellin does indeed detect Stirner's impact on the composer, despite expressing doubt that Wagner was strongly aware of his ideas through either

²⁴⁹ Brazill, 191.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 189.

²⁵¹ *Critique of the Evangelical History of John*.

²⁵² John F. Welsh, *Max Stirner's Dialectical Egoism: A New Interpretation* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2010), 3.

reading or conversation.²⁵³ There is also the incidental connection that Stirner was born in Bayreuth, the Bavarian town which eventually became the *Schwerpunkt* of Wagnerism. Stirner had already in his 1841 *Kunst und Religion*²⁵⁴ argued that the creation of and participation in both art and religion involves the alienation of man from himself in external forms – what Stirner called “gods” – that tyrannize the individual.²⁵⁵ Stirner further averred that “art is the beginning, the *alpha* of religion. Without art and the creative artist, religion would never have originated.”²⁵⁶ Wagner’s own conception of art in religious terms obviously bears the hallmark of the outcome, if not the process, of this line of reasoning.

Stirner’s most famous work is the 1845 *Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum*.²⁵⁷ It in part represents a reaction against Feuerbach’s *Wesen*, but it also criticizes Bauer, Wilhem Weitling, and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. Its title makes clear Stirner’s radically individualist position. Stirner expands his thinking from *Kunst und Religion* to the radical conclusion that belief in *any* form of external truth constitutes servitude, including not only obvious concepts like the state and property, but also even the new god of humanity set up by Feuerbach and Bauer.²⁵⁸ Stirner’s greatest influence on *Jesus von Nazareth*, then, perhaps lies in that work’s antinomianism.

²⁵³ Martin Gregor-Dellin, *Richard Wagner: His Life, His Work, His Century* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 130 and 136.

²⁵⁴ *Art and Religion*.

²⁵⁵ Brazill, 212.

²⁵⁶ Max Stirner, “Kunst und Religion,” in *Max Stirner’s Kleinere Schriften und seine Entgegnungen auf die Kritik seines Werkes: “Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum.” Aus den Jahren 1842-1847.*, ed. John Henry Mackay (Berlin: Schuster & Loeffler, 1898), 41, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=x5FYAAAAMAAJ>.

²⁵⁷ Traditionally rendered in English as *The Ego and Its Own*; alternatively, *The Individual and His Property*.

²⁵⁸ Brazill, 216-218.

Nevertheless, Stirner's extreme valorization of the ego seems to run counter to Wagner's Feuerbachian denigration thereof.

Ruge

Arnold Ruge was perhaps the most "political" of the Young Hegelians. Wagner certainly was familiar with Ruge, as, bemoaning his own homeland's apparent rejection of his works, Wagner relates in a letter to his mistress Mathilde von Wesendonck that he concurs with Ruge's assertion that "the German is vile (niederträchtig)," although Wagner clearly took Ruge's assertion out of context.²⁵⁹ Even when Wagner had moved beyond political revolutionarism late in his life, he would repeat this quotation, with the caveat that its criticism is the result of momentary desperation, and refer to its source as "a certain patriot, the wonderful Arnold Ruge."²⁶⁰ Ruge was part of Wagner's circle of revolutionary acquaintances in Dresden, along with Bakunin and Röckel.

Ruge was another philhellenic influence on Wagner, describing the Greeks as "those utterly political humans ... neither prosaic nor unphilosophical."²⁶¹ But more importantly, Ruge, to a greater extent than the other Young Hegelians, concluded that religious critique must be accompanied by social and political change, and he was an active politician, organizing the

²⁵⁹ Richard Wagner and Mathilde Wesendonck, *Richard Wagner to Mathilde Wesendonck*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), 315, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=LDRAAAAAYAAJ>. See also Wagner, *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, letter to Mathilde Wesendock of August 3, 1863, 568-569. In 1848, "Ruge had told the Bundestag in Frankfurt, 'at that time [in Paris in 1845] I said, 'the nation that tolerates this is abject.''"

²⁶⁰ Richard Wagner, *Art Life and Theories of Richard Wagner*, ed. and trans. Edward L. Burlingame (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1875), 280, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=gRErAAAIAAJ>.

²⁶¹ Arnold Ruge, "Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right' and the Politics of our Times," trans. J. A. Massey, in *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology*, ed. L. S. Stepelevich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 212.

revolutionary left at the failed 1848 Frankfurt parliament. Ruge was indeed a hammer against excessive abstraction and theoreticism. Ruge made the same sort of connection that Wagner did between inauthenticity in culture and inauthenticity in religion:

The wit and the stale humour of great cities, which are always on the lookout for momentary stars and leaders, the idolisation ... of fame, the hollow enthusiasm for dancing girls, gladiators, musicians, athletes – what does all this demonstrate? Nothing but the blasé culture that lacks real work for great goals ... Play with your super-cleverness and bore yourself to death ... but do not think that you are a total human ... The purpose of worldly culture, only to want to be clever, and of philosophism, only to want to be knowledgeable, is an *indeterminate* purpose and is related to real, effective, determinate purposes exactly as Christianity in general is related to a real confession of Christianity.²⁶²

Wagner's *Jesus von Nazareth* was to perform a dual corrective task in this regard, as it was to present a philosophically authentic (i.e., in Wagner's mind, humanistic) religious accounting in a revolutionarily instructive cultural-dramatic framework. Ruge and Wagner were furthermore congruent in their general rejection of atheism as a sufficient theology in its own right, and a hungering after a religion grounded in "immanence (as opposed to transcendence), the reality of the world, the real existence of men and nature."²⁶³

Strauss

David Friedrich Strauss was perhaps the most famous theological critic of the nineteenth century. Unlike the Hegelians, however, his criticism of the Gospels arose primarily from historical and textual considerations rather than as the outcome of a philosophical system. His

²⁶² Arnold Ruge, "A *Self-critique of Liberalism*," trans. J. A. Massey in *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology*, ed. L. S. Stepelevich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 254-255.

²⁶³ "Die Immanenz (gegen die Transcendenz), die Realität der Welt, die wirkliche Existenz des Menschen und der Natur, wird die einzige Aufgabe aller Wissenschaft und aller Praxis." Arnold Ruge, *Zwei Jahre in Paris: Studien und Erinnerungen*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: W. Jurany, 1846), 61-62, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=cHVCAAAAaAAJ>.

hugely controversial 1835 *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet*²⁶⁴ came under sustained attack from Hegelians of all stripes, and Strauss in fact originated the notion of a Left and Right Hegelian dichotomy in his response to his detractors.²⁶⁵ Wagner was certainly familiar with Strauss's works and comments on them, usually negatively, in Cosima's diaries and in his letters. However, as *Jesus von Nazareth* is concerned primarily with a philosophic or otherwise ideological portrayal of its subject, it appears that Wagner was little influenced therein by Strauss. Wagner's translator William Ashton Ellis discusses this theory at length in his preface, and he categorically rejects the contention of a certain Dr. Hugo Dinger that "Wagner appears to have derived the concept 'Mythos' from Strauss."²⁶⁶ Ashton Ellis instead makes the argument that Wagner's use of the term derives from the celebrated philologist "Jakob" (actually Jacob) Grimm, a fairly logical claim considering the composer's deep and abiding interest in Germanic mythology.²⁶⁷ However, Wagner's overall conception of the idea of myth does resemble Strauss's. Like Wagner, Strauss does not deny the existence of Jesus as a historical figure – at least at this early point in the former's career. Strauss's view of miracles in *Das Leben* is that they constitute authorial embellishments to actual historical events in the Gospels. Therefore, in calling miracles "mythical," Strauss does not suggest that they are outright fraudulent, but rather that they function imaginatively as stories in which the kernels of true ideas are cloaked.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁴ *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined.*

²⁶⁵ See David Friedrich Strauss, *Streitschriften zur Verteidigung meiner Schrift über das Leben Jesu und zur Charakteristik der gegenwärtigen Theologie* (Tübingen: E. F. Osiander, 1837), accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=NtBeo5FPiFkC>, translated as David Friedrich Strauss, *In Defense of My 'Life of Jesus' Against the Hegelians*, trans. Marilyn Chapin Massey (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1983).

²⁶⁶ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth and Other Writings*, xvii.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, xvii-xviii.

²⁶⁸ Mark Allan Powell, *Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 15-16.

Wagner's approach in *Jesus von Nazareth* and in his later oeuvre mirrors this outlook, in that the composer freely delves among various historical mythologies in synthesizing an external diegetic world that ultimately reflects his own internal artistic vision, rather than necessarily adhering in spirit to the original meanings of the symbols themselves.

In any event, Ashton Ellis is correct in asserting that *Jesus von Nazareth* is otherwise significantly un-Straussian in its outlook. Among other discrepancies, Wagner's Jesus continually prophesies his own coming death, statements which Strauss regards as instead created by the disciples *ex post facto*; and while Wagner refers to Jesus's traditional birthplace of Bethlehem, "Strauss had conclusively proved that it was Nazareth."²⁶⁹ Ashton Ellis also perceptively recognizes Wagner's debt to the Gospel of John, further discussed below, in both tone and in uniquely mentioned details, whereas Strauss had impugned the reliability of John as an author in comparison to the authority of the synoptists. However, Ashton Ellis's assertion that Wagner stresses Jesus's descent from David, in contrast to *Das Leben Jesu*'s treatment of such genealogical claims as "the rankest fiction," is misguided.²⁷⁰ While Wagner does muse on Jesus's purported Davidian descent, he ultimately likewise dismisses this as irrelevant, concluding that "Jesus brushed aside the House of David: through Adam he had sprung from God, and therefore all men were his brothers."²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth and Other Writings*, xviii-xix.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., xviii.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 298.

Weitling

Wilhelm Weitling was a journeyman tailor *cum* revolutionary agitator who espoused a Christianized sort of communism which would earn both the endorsement and the criticism of Marx and Engels. Weitling had read the works of Strauss and Lammenais and was a personal acquaintance of Bakunin's in Zurich. Weitling's works in turn had been intensely studied by Wagner's close friend Röckel, who served as a lynchpin in introducing Wagner to other left-wing thinkers, and to their ideas, in Dresden. Wagner in *Jesus von Nazareth* echoes passages mentioned in Weitling's early work, the 1838 *Die menschheit, wie sie ist und wie sie sein sollte*,²⁷² such as the revolution-evoking Matthew 10:34, in which Jesus brings not peace (εἰρήνην) but a sword (μάχαιραν).²⁷³

Weitling's most important work in the Wagnerian context, *Das Evangelium eines armen Sünders*,²⁷⁴ is an attempt to trace communism²⁷⁵ back to the Christianity of the early Church. It bears a strong resemblance to the spirit of *Jesus von Nazareth* in its reframing of Christ as an egalitarian revolutionary. Weitling was jailed by Swiss authorities on charges of blasphemy, as, among other transgressions of orthodoxy, *Das Evangelium* describes Jesus as Mary's

²⁷² *Man, as he is and as he should be.*

²⁷³ "Ihr sollt nicht wähnen, daß ich gekommen sei, Frieden auf Erden zu senden; ich bin nicht gekommen, Frieden zu senden, sondern das Schwert." Wilhelm Weitling, *Die menschheit, wie sie ist und wie sie sein sollte*, "Zweites Kapitel," accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.marxists.org/deutsch/referenz/weitling/1838/mensch/index.htm>.

²⁷⁴ *The Poor Sinner's Gospel.*

²⁷⁵ This is Weitling's definition of communism: "Communism is a way of organizing society which makes use of all human possibilities, all hands, all minds, all hearts, every talent, intelligence and emotion for the highest possible satisfaction of the needs, desires and wishes of each individual, or in other words, the fullest possible enjoyment of his personal freedom." (Wilhelm Weitling, *The Poor Sinner's Gospel*, trans. Dinah Livingstone [London: Sheed and Ward, 1969], "11. What is Communism?," accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.gospelofthomas.org/poorsinnersgospel.html>.) Weitling, who was a tailor by trade, somewhat ironically became a capitalist inventor of sorts after emigrating to America, ultimately holding several sewing machine patents there.

“illegitimate child” by Joseph, as Jesus’s descent from the line of David (which Weitling takes literally) through Joseph must mean that Joseph is his father.²⁷⁶ Jesus’s shame at this situation meant that he instead “preferred to call himself a child of God” than of the son of Joseph.²⁷⁷ Wagner himself would leave the question of Jesus’s parentage somewhat ambiguous.

Weitling was heavily influenced by various French revolutionary sources who had identified Christ’s ministry with their own socialistic struggle, including Gracchus Babeuf and Philippe Buonarroti;²⁷⁸ in the same vein, François Chabot had even proclaimed, “Le citoyen Jésus Christ est le premier sans-culotte du monde!”²⁷⁹ David McLellan summarizes Weitling’s message of Christian-derived communism in *Das Evangelium*:

The kernel of christianity [sic] was the struggle of the poor for an earthly kingdom based on love, and his *Gospel* was a summons to those without inheritance or rights to change the corrupt world themselves. There is little concern here for a world hereafter, little emphasis on patience and humility; God is all perfection and the unknown motive force behind nature; religion is the striving after this ideal; Jesus Christ is the perfect example of a fighter for freedom and justice.²⁸⁰

These are in most respects much the same thematic elements to be found in *Jesus von Nazareth*. Additionally, for Weitling, “Jesus’ concept of the community of mankind involved the abolition of the family;”²⁸¹ this recalls Wagner’s own attempt to redefine marriage, and thus also the

²⁷⁶ Weitling, *The Poor Sinner’s Gospel*, “6. The Pure Teaching of Jesus, I. The Principle of the Christian Community, (viii) The Family.”

²⁷⁷ Ibid. Weitling himself was an illegitimate child whose father was killed in Napoleon’s Russian campaign a few years after Weitling’s birth in Magdeburg in 1808.

²⁷⁸ Weitling, *The Poor Sinner’s Gospel*, “Foreward to the English Edition [David McLellan].”

²⁷⁹ “The citizen, Jesus Christ, is the first sans-culotte in the world!” Qtd. in Edward Latham, ed., *Famous sayings and their authors; a collection of historical sayings in English, French, German, Greek, Italian, and Latin* (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1970), 135. Cf. to the response of Camille Desmoulins, when asked his age by a revolutionary tribunal: “J’ai l’âge au sans-culotte Jésus, trente-trois ans quand il mourut.” (“I am the age of the sans-culotte Jesus, thirty-three years when he died.”) (Ibid.)

²⁸⁰ Weitling, *The Poor Sinner’s Gospel*, “Foreward to the English Edition [David McLellan].”

²⁸¹ Weitling, *The Poor Sinner’s Gospel*, “6. The Pure Teaching of Jesus, I. The Principle of the Christian Community, (viii) The Family.”

familial unit, solely in terms of reciprocal love, rather than on any biological or legal foundation.

Weitling's Jesus is also, like Wagner's, radically anti-materialist and antinomian:

Jesus has no respect for property. It is easy to understand why. A man who was concerned with the good of the people and saw this good in the community of property and the abolition of private ownership, inheritance, laws and punishments, who said expressly that he had come to preach the gospel to the *poor*. Naturally he would have no respect for private ownership for it was what hindered the putting of his teaching into practice more than anything else; it had impoverished those people to whom he had come to preach. Every attack on the property of the rich by the poor would be at least excused by him and not condemned, because for one thing Jesus was against all human judgment and punishment.²⁸²

Weitling's basis for such conclusions is an analysis – which, like Wagner's, is frequently ideologically driven – of many of the same scriptures cited in *Jesus von Nazareth*, particularly Jesus's parables. Weitling also devotes much effort to teasing out apparent scriptural contradictions, particularly in an appendiceal defense of his *Das Evangelium* before a Zurich court. This at times even leads him to directly question the divinity of Jesus, as he proposes, e.g., that the assertion that God cannot be tempted in James 1:13 seems to contradict Jesus's own actual temptation, unless Jesus is not God, a line of reasoning on which Wagner is comparatively silent.²⁸³

Weitling, like Wagner, makes a strong connection between freedom and love, and asserts that Jesus makes this explicit: “Religion must not be destroyed but used to free humanity. Christianity is the religion of freedom, moderation and enjoyment, not of oppression, extravagance and abstinence. Christ is a prophet of freedom. His teaching is a teaching of freedom and love and he is therefore a picture for us of God and love.”²⁸⁴ Though flawed in its

²⁸² Weitling, *The Poor Sinner's Gospel*, “5. Revolutionary Propaganda, (i) Jesus Has No Respect for Property.”

²⁸³ Ibid. Weitling's claim is less credible, however, given his attribution of this statement of untemptability to Paul, who has never been seriously proposed to have been the author of the Epistle of James. Cf. with the temptation of Christ in Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, and Luke 4:1-13.

²⁸⁴ Weitling, *The Poor Sinner's Gospel*, “Appendix: Weitling's First Defence.”

present form, for Weitling religion is thus also worth redeeming, evidence of the same motivation which would compel Wagner to aestheticize Christ in *Jesus von Nazareth*. This flowed along the same lines as Feuerbach had asserted: religion was in fact a fundamental external manifestation of human consciousness; therefore it could not be destroyed but instead needed to be re-calibrated.

***Junges Deutschland* and Saint-Simone**

Magee calls Wagner's second opera, the now nearly-forgotten *Das Liebesverbot*, "a paradigm case of a work written in response to, and under the influence of, a current intellectual movement."²⁸⁵ That movement was known as *Junges Deutschland*, or "Young Germany," which was a contemporary grouping of writers who sought to move literature beyond mere *belles-lettres* through the espousal of political, economic, and religious liberalism. Its influence continues to be noticeable in Wagner's other works, including *Jesus von Nazareth*. Heinrich Heine, one of its more prominent members, was particularly influential on Wagner, and ironically so given the poet's Jewish parentage. In addition to musically arranging some of Heine's poems, Wagner based his 1843 opera *Der fliegende Holländer* on Heine's retelling of the original legend of the Flying Dutchman.²⁸⁶ (Wagner's *Tannhäuser* is also based in part on Heine's writings.) Like nearly all of Wagner's post-adolescent works, including *Jesus von Nazareth*, the central theme of *Holländer* is the idea of redemption through love. Heine's Dutchman is also explicitly identified with the mythological figure of the Wandering Jew, a Jew

²⁸⁵ Magee, 24. An adaptation of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, *Das Liebesverbot* focuses on the conflict of love with the social order.

²⁸⁶ Heine's satiric account is found in his 1833 novel *Aus den Memoiren des Herrn von Schnabelewopski* (*The Memoirs of Mister von Schnabelewopski*).

who cursed Christ on the cross and was subsequently condemned to wander the earth until Christ's return. Wagner would later also in part base the character of Kundry in *Parsifal* on the Wandering Jew, but Kundry also derives to some degree from Wagner's conception of Mary Magdalene in *Jesus von Nazareth*. Ironically, Wagner in *Das Judenthum in der Musik* would go on to abuse Heine, who had "duped himself into a poet, and was rewarded by his versified lies being set to music by our own composers.—He was the conscience of Judaism, just as Judaism is the evil conscience of our modern Civilisation."²⁸⁷ The conflation of Judaism with the ills of modern society echoes same concern with legalism, materialism, and lovelessness that Wagner associates with the pharisaical Jewish opposition to Jesus.

Heine's 1826 volume *Reisebilder* concludes with a poem entitled "Frieden," ("Peace"), which depicts Christ as a towering figure emanating from the sun:

<p>Hoch am Himmel stand die Sonne, Von weißen Wolken umwogt, Das Meer war still, Und sinnend lag ich am Steuer des Schiffes, Träumerisch sinnend - und, halb im Wachen Und halb im Schlummer, schaute ich Christus, Den Heiland der Welt. Im wallend weißen Gewande Wandelt' er riesengroß Über Land und Meer; Es ragte sein Haupt in den Himmel, Die Hände streckte er segnend Über Land und Meer; Und als ein Herz in der Brust Trug er die Sonne, Die rote, flammende Sonne, Und das rote, flammende Sonnenherz Goß seine Gnadenstrahlen Und sein holdes, liebseliges Licht, Erleuchtend und wärmend, Über Land und Meer.</p>	<p>The sun stood high in the heavens Swathed in white clouds; The sea was still. I lay in the helm of the vessel, Dreamily musing ... When, half awake And half asleep, I saw the Christ, The Saviour of the world. In a white, waving garment He walked, tall as a giant, Over land and sea. His head rose into the heavens, His hands were stretched in blessing Over land and sea; And, like a heart in his breast, He carried the sun, The great, red, burning sun. And that flaming heart, that fiery splendor, Poured all its hallowed sunbeams, And all its tender, compassionate light, Wide-spread and warming, Over land and sea.²⁸⁸</p>
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²⁸⁷ Wagner, *Judaism in Music*, 100.

²⁸⁸ Heinrich Heine, *Poems of Heinrich Heine*, trans. Louis Untermeyer (New York, Henry Holt, 1917), 184, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://people.umass.edu/~shea/frieden.html>.

George Brandes describes this apparition as a sort of “Jesus-Apollo.”²⁸⁹ Such a characterization immediately brings to mind Wagner’s own Christian-Hellenic concatenation of these figures as “two sublimest teachers of mankind” in *Die Kunst und die Revolution*. Heine’s Christ as a giant bestriding the world, connecting the earth and the sun, seems to symbolically resemble the protagonist of *Jesus von Nazareth*, a quintessentially earthly figure who simultaneously unites the material and the spiritual.

Heine attacked the Franco-Swiss *saloniste* Madame de Staël’s allegedly reactionary characterization of the state of German culture in his 1835 *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland*,²⁹⁰ wherein he sets forth his optimistic hope that future generations will be “gezeugt durch freie Wahlumarmung, in einer Religion der Freude emporblühen,” in contrast with the repressed sensuality of the present.²⁹¹ Heine asserts that man is meant to be happy rather than to suffer, and that his happiness should be pursued through social reform in the present life: “Schon hier auf Erden möchte ich, durch die Segnungen freier politischer und industrieller Institutionen jene Seligkeit etabliren, die, nach der Meinung der Frommen, erst am jüngsten Tage, im Himmel, statt finden soll;”²⁹² though there remains the possibility that “es

²⁸⁹ George Brandes, *Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature, Volume Six: Young Germany* (London: W. Heinemann, 1906), 230, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=6JE-AAAAYAAJ>. In contrast, Friedrich Hölderlin identified Jesus with Dionysus in his poem “Brod [sic] und Wein,” known as “Der Weingott” in an early version. ([Hyperion and Selected Poems: Friedrich Hölderlin](#)) Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hyperion and Selected Poems: Friedrich Hölderlin*, ed. Eric L. Santer (New York: Continuum, 1990), 292.

²⁹⁰ *History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*.

²⁹¹ “...begotten in free-choice embraces, will flourish in a religion of joy and pleasure.” Heinrich Heine, *Der Salon*, vol 2 (Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe, 1834), 16, accessed November 27, 2013, books.google.com/books?id=fCTiAAAAMAAJ. Translated in Heinrich Heine, *The Works of Heinrich Heine*, vol. 5, trans. Charles Godfrey Leland (London: William Heinemann, 1892), 9, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=ThFcAAAAMAAJ>.

²⁹² “I would beforehand, by the blessings of free political and industrial institutions, establish that happiness, which, according to the religious, will be first found in heaven on the day of judgment.” Heine, *Der Salon*, 17, and Heine *The Works of Heinrich Heine*, 9.

giebt keine Auferstehung der Menschheit, weder im politisch moralischen, noch im apostolisch katholischen Sinne.”²⁹³ This is entirely Wagner’s program in *Jesus von Nazareth*: love founded on freedom, humanistic improvement of life-conditions, and a resurrection omitted as irrelevant.

One should also recall that shortly before his work on *Jesus von Nazareth*, Wagner had been occupied with a dramatic sketch of the life of the medieval German emperor Friedrich Barbarossa, who is associated with a legend which asserts that he is not dead, but rather asleep beneath the Kyffhäuser hills between what are now the states of Thuringia and Saxony-Anhalt, and Germany will be restored to greatness with his reawakening. Heine seized upon this legend to declare Barbarossa the symbolic god of the coming revolution; he would return “holding in his hand the divine scepter of liberty, and carrying upon his head the imperial crown without a Cross.”²⁹⁴ The cross is likewise of minimal metaphorical importance to the unresurrected liberator Christ of *Jesus von Nazareth*.²⁹⁵

In terms of religious views, the *Junges Deutschland* school was influenced by D. F. Strauss, but also by the utopian socialist Comte de Saint-Simon (as many *Junges Deutschland* writers were, like Wagner, Parisian expatriates), who in his 1825 *Nouveau Christianisme* had located the central theme of Christianity in the amelioration of the lot of the poor. Also recalling Wagner, he further allocated to artists a crucial role in his ideal social order. Wagner came into

²⁹³ “...perhaps there is to be no resurrection of humanity either in the politico-moral or in the apostolic-catholic sense.” Heine, *Der Salon*, 17, and Heine, *The Works of Heinrich Heine*, 10.

²⁹⁴ Qtd. in Berry, *Treacherous Bonds and Laughing Fire*, 41.

²⁹⁵ It has been speculated that in the earliest era of Christianity, the crucifixion was abhorred rather than celebrated, and did not come to be used as a primary symbol until after Constantine’s adoption of the chi-rho labarum and the motto “εν τούτῳ νικά (In hoc signo vinces / In this sign shall you conquer)” subsequent to his vision of the cross before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge on October 28, AD 312.

contact with Saint-Simon's ideas through his associations with *Junges Deutschland*,²⁹⁶ and likely also through his acquaintance with Liszt, who attended Saint-Simonian meetings in Paris.²⁹⁷ Coar relates that Wagner's friend Georg Herwegh had himself been "made an apostate" by Strauss's *Leben Jesu*, and "the dogma of Christian humility, preached to the people in distorted form, roused his ire."²⁹⁸ In his poem "Aufruf" from *Gedichte eines Lebendigen*,²⁹⁹ Herwegh had no difficulty combining political and religious upheaval (Coar's translation is free):

Reisst die Kreuze aus der Erden!	Tear the crosses from their bases!
Alle sollen Schwerter werden!	Forge them into swords and maces!
Gott im Himmel wird's verzeih'n. ³⁰⁰	God above will pardon thee.
Lasst, o lasst das Verseschweissen,	Be no useless versifier,
Auf den Amboss legt das Eisen –	Snatch the iron from the fire –
Heiland soll das Eisen sein!	Iron let our saviour be! ³⁰¹

The transformation of religion into revolution again recalls Wagner's Jesus, he who brings not peace, but a sword. The call against useless versification mirrors Wagner's own active politico-revolutionary participation. "Iron" as a savior implies redemption through force of action rather than contemplation, and Wagner's deification of the revolution itself.

Wagner had been introduced to Heine in Paris through his friendship with the radical journalist, author, and politician Heinrich Laube. Glasenapp describes Laube's novel *Das Neue*

²⁹⁶ See further Manfred Keckel, *Richard Wagner und die französischen Frühsozialisten: die Bedeutung der Kunst und des Künstlers für eine neue Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1986).

²⁹⁷ Alan Walker, et al, *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Liszt, Franz, §4: The death of Adam Liszt," (Oxford University Press), accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/48265pg4>.

²⁹⁸ John Firman Coar, *Studies in German Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1903), 204, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=GYgtAAAAyAAJ>.

²⁹⁹ Loosely, "Call to Arms" in *Poems of a Living Being*.

³⁰⁰ Cf. Heinrich Heine's attributed last words: "Gott wird mir verzeihen, das ist sein Beruf. (God will forgive me, that is his profession.)" Qtd. in Werner Ilberg, *Unser Heine, eine kritische Würdigung* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1952).

³⁰¹ Qtd. in Coar, 204.

*Jahrhundert*³⁰² as full of “heaven-storming thoughts of freedom;”³⁰³ and Wagner went on to have a close association with its author, described in detail in *Mein Leben*. Laube was moreover an avowed Saint-Simonian. His 1836 *Die Poeten* echoes this influence in its espousal of a radical egalitarianism shared with *Jesus von Nazareth*. In *Die Poeten* Laube proclaims, “jeder einzelne soll frei werden,” and further that “alles muss für alle erreichbar sein!”³⁰⁴

Finally, Wagner was also familiar with the works of Karl Gutzkow, who was a dramaturge in Dresden during Wagner’s employment as *Hofkapellmeister*. Though Wagner personally disliked Gutzkow (in part because Gutzkow had been appointed in Dresden instead of Laube),³⁰⁵ Wagner was familiar with Gutzkow’s novel *Wally die Zweiflerin*,³⁰⁶ the tale of a woman who loses her faith and commits suicide after her husband leaves her for a Jewess. Again in line with Wagner’s views on the freedom of love, Gutzkow’s heroine describes her husband: “Das Sakrament der Ehe ist nach seiner Theorie die Liebe, nicht des Priesters Segen.”³⁰⁷

Bakunin

Wagner was on intimate terms with the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin during his time in Dresden. The two took part, along with August Röckel, in the unsuccessful May 1849 uprising

³⁰² *The New Century*.

³⁰³ Glasenapp, vol. 1, 147.

³⁰⁴ “..each individual should be free” and “everything must be attainable by all.” Heinrich Laube, *Die Poeten* (Mannheim: Verlag von Heinrich Hoff, 1836), 36 and 31, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=Rm5KAAAacAAJ>.

³⁰⁵ Paul Lawrence Rose, *Wagner: Race and Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 36.

³⁰⁶ *Wally the Skeptic*.

³⁰⁷ “According to his theory, the sacrament of marriage is love, not the blessing of a priest.” Karl Gutzkow, *Wally, die Zweiflerin*, (Jena: Hermann Constenoble, 1905), 131, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=VXQuAAAAYAAJ>.

which precipitated Wagner's flight into eventual Swiss exile.³⁰⁸ Wagner was an active participant in these events, procuring ammunition and explosives, distributing propaganda, and acting as a lookout from the steeple of the Frauenkirche, the very building in which *Das Liebesmahl der Apostel* had been performed, though he would later attempt to downplay his role.

Jesus von Nazareth is barely mentioned in *Mein Leben*. Incidentally, however, when it does appear, it does so in the context of Wagner's acquaintance with Bakunin.

Inspired by a recent reading of the Gospels, I had at that time just produced a sketch for a tragedy to be performed in the ideal theater of the future and to be entitled *Jesus von Nazareth*; Bakunin asked me to spare him any details about it; yet as I seemingly won him over by saying a few words about my general plan, he wished me luck but requested me with great vehemence to make certain Jesus would be represented as a weak character. As to the music, he advised me to compose only one passage but in all possible variations: the tenor was to sing: 'Off with his head!', the soprano 'To the gallows', and the basso continuo 'Fire, fire!'³⁰⁹

This is remarkable in several regards. It certainly reflects Bakunin's well-known fetishism for pyroclasmic violence. He had memorably fantasized about a "gigantic bonfire of London, Paris, and Berlin,"³¹⁰ (at other times substituting St. Petersburg for the latter)³¹¹ and insisted that "the passion for destruction is a creative passion, too!"³¹² Symbolically, Bakunin's influence on Wagner is traditionally most strongly identified with the *Ring* cycle, which concludes with the fiery immolation of the existing world order and an implied rebirth of a new world based on

³⁰⁸ See Wagner's arrest warrant in appendix below. Wagner, in *Mein Leben*, also somewhat humorously describes Röckel's shearing of Bakunin's famously large beard in order to disguise the anarchist during his subsequent flight from prosecution. (Wagner, *My Life* [1983], 389.)

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 387. Bakunin's suggestions clearly refer to the crowd calling for Jesus's crucifixion.

³¹⁰ "Gnosis and the Metaphysical Left," accessed November 27, 2013, http://www.gnosticliberationfront.com/gnosis_and_the_metaphysical_left.htm.

³¹¹ Magee, 39.

³¹² Mikhail Bakunin, "The Reaction in Germany," in *Bakunin on Anarchy*, ed. and trans. Sam Dolgoff, (1971), accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bakunin/works/1842/reaction-germany.htm>.

love, and free from the greed, hate, and legalism of the past.³¹³ (Wagner at one point refers to Bakunin as “the chief pyrotechnicist.”)³¹⁴ The concept of “creative destruction” to some extent recalls Hegel’s notion of “sublation” (*Aufhebung*), which describes the advancement of the dialectic through the seemingly paradoxical process of negation. Creative destruction would eventually come to signify a form of economic progression for thinkers like Karl Marx and Joseph Schumpeter.³¹⁵ Bakunin had a more apocalyptic view, arguing that after this revolutionary destruction, “there will be a qualitative transformation, a new living, life-giving revelation, a new heaven and a new earth, a young and mighty world in which all our present dissonances will be resolved into a harmonious whole.”³¹⁶ This is same sort of socio-spiritual transformation which the Jesus of *Jesus von Nazareth* is supposed to usher in. The redemptive results of Jesus’s own sacrificial crucifixion could certainly be conceived as a creatively destructive act, though with the proviso that this constituted an ethical rather than supernatural example.

Wagner was in fact somewhat taken aback by Bakunin’s propensity for violence, recoiling from his anarchic philosophy as “an annihilation of all civilization” and a set of “horrendous doctrines.” Further, “Was any of us insane enough to believe he would survive after

³¹³ Wagner reunited with Bakunin in his Swiss exile but was unable to significantly interest him in the ongoing development of the *Ring*. “I wanted to explain to him, my nibelung [sic] work, but he refused to listen. . . . As regards the music, he always advised me to repeat the same text in various melodies: Struggle and Destruction. The tenor was to urge the need from strife to chaos. The soprano was to do so, and the baritone also.” Qtd. in Guy A. Aldred, *Bakunin* (Glasgow: The Strickland Press, 1940), “9.—In Exile and Action,” accessed November 27, 2013, http://anarvist.freeshell.org/Bakunin_by_Aldred_Guy_Alfred_1886_1963_.htm.

³¹⁴ Wagner, *My Life* (1983), 384.

³¹⁵ See particularly Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1942).

³¹⁶ Qtd. in George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History Of Libertarian Ideas And Movements*, (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview, 2004), 126.

the goal of annihilation had been reached? ...how could we expect the arsonists themselves to survey these ruins with the faculty of reason intact?”³¹⁷ Nevertheless, Wagner found himself “sympathetically drawn to this prodigious man.”³¹⁸ Further, “Bakunin longed after the highest ideals of humanity. His nature reflected a strangeness to all the conventionalities of civilisation. That is why the impression of my association with him is so mixed. I was repelled by an instinctive fear of him; yet he drew me like a magnet.”³¹⁹

This may in part derive from Bakunin’s claim, recalling Wagner’s own, to uphold the true essence of Christian love: “Indeed, for us alone, who are called the enemies of the Christian religion, for us alone it is reserved, and even made the highest duty ... really to exercise love, this highest commandment of Christ and this only way to true Christianity.”³²⁰ This may have been love of a more earthly sort, though, as Bakunin once exclaimed to Wagner’s first wife Minna (perhaps, unexpectedly, not to Wagner’s consternation), “A real man must not think beyond the satisfaction of his first needs. The only true worthy passion for man is love.”³²¹ This would certainly be in line with Wagner’s own libidinous tendencies.

Bakunin would also later echo Wagner’s own dualist disdain for the God of the Old Testament, “Jehovah, who of all the good gods adored by men was certainly the most jealous, the most vain, the most ferocious, the most unjust, the most bloodthirsty, the most despotic, and

³¹⁷ Qtd. in Magee, 39. Bakunin, who attended Wagner’s performance of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony on Palm Sunday, 1849, did admit to Wagner “that, if all music were to be lost in the coming world conflagration, we should risk our lives to preserve this symphony.” (Wagner, *My Life* [1983], 384.)

³¹⁸ Wagner, *My Life* (1983), 386-387.

³¹⁹ Aldred, “9.—In Exile and Action.”

³²⁰ Bakunin, *The Reaction in Germany*.

³²¹ Aldred, “9.—In Exile and Action.”

the most hostile to human dignity and liberty.” Bakunin in fact goes on to invert the concept of original sin and to define Satan’s tempting of Adam and Eve, and their subsequent attainment of knowledge, as the great liberating act of human history.³²² Though this assessment, written in 1871, postdates *Jesus von Nazareth*, it will be seen that it remarkably congruent (save for its reversal of the Edenic Fall) with Wagner’s own simultaneously developing views on his assertion of a Jehova/Jesus distinction.

Röckel

August Röckel has already been mentioned in the context of several of Wagner’s various radical connections. Facilitation of such contact was indeed his greatest role in the composer’s development. Röckel was Wagner’s close friend and assistant conductor (*Musikdirector*) during most of his 1843-1849 tenure as Dresden’s *Hofkapellmeister*, though Röckel’s radicalism eventually caused the termination of his employment.³²³ In addition to introducing Wagner to other revolutionary thinkers, Röckel managed fora such as the *Volksblätter* and the *Vaterlandsverein* in which Wagner could develop his own ideas. Wagner’s first wife Minna would explicitly blame Röckel for her husband’s “seduction by politics,” which contributed to the failure of their marriage.³²⁴ Wagner acquired many of his radical ideas during peripatetic

³²² Mikhail Bakunin, *God and the State*, trans. Benjamin R. Tucker (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1916), “Chapter I,” accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bakunin/works/godstate/>.

³²³ Mark Berry, “Richard Wagner and the Politics of Music-Drama,” *The Historical Journal*, vol. 47, no. 3 (Sep., 2004): 681, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4091760>. According to *Mein Leben*, Röckel was from a highly musical background; he was the nephew of the Austrian composer and pianist Johann Nepomuk Hummel, and his father had inaugurated the role of Florestan in the premiere of Beethoven’s *Fidelio*. (Wagner, *My Life* [1911], 306.)

³²⁴ Paul Lawrence Rose, 60.

discussions with Röckel around Dresden, and he describes Röckel's revolutionary program in detail in *Mein Leben*:

On these occasions I often got lost in the most wildly speculative and profound discussions, while this wonderfully exciteable [sic] man always remained calmly reflective and clear-headed. First and foremost, he had planned a drastic social reform of the middle classes—as at present constituted—by aiming at a complete alteration of the basis of their condition. He constructed a totally new moral order of things, founded on the teaching of Proudhon and other socialists regarding the annihilation of the power of capital, by immediately productive labour, dispensing with the middleman. Little by little he converted me, by most seductive arguments, to his own views, to such an extent that I began to rebuild my hopes for the realisation of my ideal in art upon them. Thus there were two questions which concerned me very nearly: he wished to abolish matrimony, in the usual acceptation of the word, altogether. I thereupon asked him what he thought the result would be of promiscuous intercourse with women of a doubtful character. With amiable indignation he gave me to understand that we could have no idea about the purity of morals in general, and of the relations of the sexes in particular, so long as we were unable to free people completely from the yoke of the trades, guilds, and similar coercive institutions. He asked me to consider what the only motive would be which would induce a woman to surrender herself to a man, when not only the considerations of money, fortune, position, and family prejudices, but also the various influences necessarily arising from these, had disappeared. When I, in my turn, asked him whence he would obtain persons of great intellect and of artistic ability, if everybody were to be merged in the working classes, he met my objection by replying, that owing to the very fact that everybody would participate in the necessary labour according to his strength and capacity, work would cease to be a burden, and would become simply an occupation which would finally assume an entirely artistic character. He demonstrated this on the principle that, as had already been proved, a field, worked laboriously by a single peasant, was infinitely less productive than when cultivated by several persons in a scientific way. These and similar suggestions, which Röckel communicated to me with a really delightful enthusiasm, led me to further reflections, and gave birth to new plans upon which, to my mind, a possible organisation of the human race, which would correspond to my highest ideals in art, could alone be based.³²⁵

Wagner, as an artist, was clearly fixated on how such ideas could be best communicated, and indeed reified, through the transformative power of his art. The abstract hashing-out of this problem is apparent in Wagner's theoretical essays, but *Jesus von Nazareth* represents a concrete effort at developing a drama in which the principles of revolution are subsumed and conveyed in a religious-historical guise. Wagner's eventual abandonment of the project illustrates the difficulty of creating an artistically-convincing rendering of such a view of man whose thoroughgoing hyper-politicization leads it astray from the more immutable and universally resonant essences of the human condition.

³²⁵ Wagner, *My Life* (1911), 452-453.

Proudhon

Röckel's mention of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon reminds us of the latter's influence on Wagner. Proudhon was Europe's first self-declared anarchist, and his socialism was endorsed by Bakunin.³²⁶ Proudhon had a knack for encapsulating his ideas in aphorisms like "Property is theft" and "Anarchy is order," which, though extreme, bear some resemblance to Wagner's thinking. However, Proudhon did envision his anarchic ideal as being peacefully implemented, a non-violent conviction not necessarily shared by Wagner and his more militant revolutionism. As we have seen, Wagner was certainly familiar with Proudhon's works at the time of his drafting of *Jesus von Nazareth*, but he describes how his study of the anarchist, "and in particular his *De la propriété*," actually intensified after his flight from Dresden, in part in an attempt to "glean comfort for my situation," that situation being Wagner's own poverty.³²⁷ Wagner is presumably here referring to Proudhon's 1840 *Qu'est-ce que la propriété?*, rather than to his similarly-titled later works.³²⁸

Proudhon considered the purported necessity of societal leaders to be an artifact of primitively human or even animal origin which could be dispensed with by a sufficiently advanced civilization. The imposition of order by a leader can only be maintained by force; thus conflict is inherent in authority. Having renounced authority, society should instead be based on voluntary cooperation, which also extends to the economic realm, in that ownership of property can only be justified if it is within the individual's own scope of utilization; accumulation beyond this is thus unjust theft. Hence the common anarchist slogan, "from each according to his means;

³²⁶ Aldred, *Bakunin*, "6.—The French and German Spirit."

³²⁷ Wagner, *My Life* (1911), 509.

³²⁸ In full, *Qu'est-ce que la propriété? ou Recherche sur le principe du Droit et du Gouvernement (What Is Property?: or, An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government)*.

to each according to his needs.”³²⁹ This theory of mutualism (“*mutuellisme*”) is entirely in accord with Wagner’s opposition to materialism and “capital,” and indeed closely resembles his economic outlook in *Jesus von Nazareth*. Indeed, it even recalls the message of Acts 4:34-35, which may have also informed Wagner’s outlook in *Das Liebesmahl der Apostel*.³³⁰ Wagner would in fact, near the very end of his life, declare that Proudhon had not gone far enough. Observing “unoccupied palaces” in Venice eight days before his death in that city in 1883, Wagner, per Cosima, proclaimed: “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.”³³¹ Ironically, Wagner was himself lodging in the Ca' Vendramin Calergi, a similarly sumptuous palazzo on the Grand Canal (where he had composed *Tristan und Isolde* during a previous sojourn); if pressed on the matter he would no doubt have defended himself on the basis of the contrast between the inutility of vacant property and his own active habitation along the lines of the aforementioned maxim of “to each according to his needs.” (Wagner in his later days fetishistically surrounded himself with luxurious perfumed silks, claiming that he could not properly compose otherwise.)³³² To return to Wagner’s Venetian

³²⁹ Magee, 36.

³³⁰ “There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.” (English Standard Version)

³³¹ Cosima Wagner, vol. 2, entry of Monday, February 5, 1883, 1004.

³³² See John W. Barker, *Wagner and Venice* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2008), 288-289. Wagner’s contemporary Henriette Perl describes the composer’s decadence in this regard: “As soon as Wagner entered into his study, the real world, along with the gray garments of his daily miseries, fell away from him. The aspect of the happy, joyous splendor of color, the rustling and crinkling of the silks, the perfect designs of expensive laces, the rose-charged air of the Persian garden, all that he had to see, to feel: it had become a requirement for him, toward his artistic and ethical means.—This atmosphere, and non other, exerted upon him a purely miraculous magic, which he required in order to produce something purely miraculous.”(Qtd. in *ibid.*) Wagner’s fabric fetishism would at one point be publically exposed by the Viennese satirist Daniel Spitzer, whose publication of Wagner’s correspondence with Wagner’s seamstress and interior decorator Bertha Goldwag Maretschek so humiliated the composer that he briefly considered immigrating to America. See Susan Clermont, “To Richard Wagner on His

outburst, though it demonstrates an admixture of his latterly more heavily-emphasized racialist concerns, it does confirm his lifelong espousal of antimaterialism – in tandem with his lifelong indebtedness.

In a further resemblance to Proudhon, Wagner thought, as we have seen in *Die Kunst und die Revolution*, that he could overcome the dilemma of disorder in a stateless society by having art itself function as a forceful yet non-compulsive organizing principle. The prospect of personal freedom offered in Proudhon's (and Bakunin's) vision also does much to explain Wagner's attraction thereto, rather than to, say, the more regimented approach of Marxism.

Proudhon was also virulently anti-Semitic,³³³ but much of his thinking in this regard was expressed privately in his diaries, many of which postdate *Jesus von Nazareth*. Paul Lawrence Rose, who has a questionable tendency to locate “implicit” anti-Jewish themes in works which do not overtly express such sentiments, has in this manner nevertheless identified *Qu'est-ce que la propriété?* as an anti-Semitic treatise, and finds it to have appealed to Wagner primarily for this reason;³³⁴ he likewise somewhat dubiously declares that *Jesus von Nazareth* lacks the

200th Birthday: A Textilian Tale Retold,” accessed November 27, 2013, <http://blogs.loc.gov/music/2013/05/to-richard-wagner-on-his-200th-birthday-a-textilian-tale-retold/>.

³³³ Proudhon's denigration of property necessitated that his attacks on the Jews initially take a socio-economic form, viz.: “A race incapable of forming a state, ungovernable by itself, is wonderfully in agreement about exploiting others.” Moreover, “The Jew is by temperament unproductive, neither agriculturalist, nor industrialist, nor even a genuine trader. He is an intermediary, always fraudulent and parasitical, who operates in business as in philosophy ... He is the evil element, Satan, Ahriman, incarnated in the race of Shem.” Proudhon went further in his unpublished writings: “The Jews – unsociable, stubborn, infernal race ... I hate this nation ... Abolish the synagogues, allow them no employment, finally proceed with the abolition of this religion. Not for nothing have the Christians called them deicides. The Jew is the enemy of mankind. That race must be sent back to Asia or exterminated.” After condemning specific individuals, including Heine, the Rothschilds, and Marx, Proudhon concludes that “by fire or fusion or expulsion the Jews must disappear ... What the peoples of the middle ages hated by instinct I hate upon reflection and irrevocably.” (Qtd. in Paul Lawrence Rose, 64.)

³³⁴ Ibid., 65.

expected degree of overt anti-Semitic elements because these are so heavily internalized within the work as to render their explicit expression unnecessarily redundant.³³⁵ Proudhon’s anti-Semitism, though broad in scope, is notable in the context of *Jesus von Nazareth* for its extension to the theological realm; Proudhon declares that the Jews “placed themselves outside the human race by their messianic obstinacy and their rejection of Christ.”³³⁶ Further, the Jews’ claim to monotheistic uniqueness and the national pre-eminence derivative thereof is also said to be false, as seen in, for example, their use of a plural word, by which is presumably meant *Elohim* (אלהים), to represent God. This is a linguistically flawed analysis, as *Elohim*, while plural in form, can function either singularly or plurally in meaning; in the former case, it is an example of a Hebrew plural intensive (a *pluralis excellentiae* as defined by the early nineteenth-century Hebraist Wilhelm Gesenius) whose plurality conveys not number but instead magnitude; thus *Elohim* used with a singular verb certainly means not “gods,” and moreover not just “God,” but more properly, “great (or true) God.”³³⁷ Nevertheless, for Proudhon, “Judaism is hierarchized polytheism ... Monotheism is so little a Jewish or Semitic idea that the race of Shem was repudiated by it, rejected...by the declaration of the Apostles to the unyielding Jews ... Monotheism is a creation of the Indo-Germanic mind; it could only have come from there.”³³⁸ Proudhon, like Wagner, attempted to present his anti-Semitic thesis as simultaneously both theologically grounded but ultimately as the product of rational analysis – and he also shares the mature Wagner’s conflation of Vedic and Germanic Aryanism, as well as Wagner’s ongoing

³³⁵ Ibid., 56-57.

³³⁶ Ibid., 64-65.

³³⁷ Cf. Bible Hub, s.v. “430. Elohim,” in *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, Unabridged*.

³³⁸ Qtd. in Paul Lawrence Rose, 65.

attempt to divorce the Jewish Jehova from the true Christian God. Wagner in *Jesus von Nazareth* likewise attempts to exude a tone of philosophic reason that is nevertheless ostensibly scripturally buttressed.

Lamennais and Lamartine

Félicité de Lamennais was a radical (and ultimately defrocked) French priest who proposed a theory of what could be called a theocratic form of democracy. While Lamennais's fame had been secured by his establishmentarian *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion* (1817),³³⁹ which would not be in accord with Wagner's opposition to "official" religion, Lamennais grew increasingly estranged from the church hierarchy as his views became progressively less orthodox. By the time of his *Des progrès de la révolution et de la guerre contre l'Église* (1829),³⁴⁰ Lamennais was a full-throated advocate of liberal democracy and its attendant principles – and thus even of the separation of church and state – which was nevertheless to be achieved through religious means. In some sense, Lamennais sought to "substitute theocracy for monarchy."³⁴¹ All of this is in accord with the themes of *Jesus von Nazareth*, where Christ's spiritual doctrines are set to the end of a societal reorganization.

Lamennais also heavily influenced Wagner's close correspondent and eventual father-in-law Franz Liszt, whose Catholicism strengthened as his life progressed. Even in his youth Liszt was a disciple of the Frenchman; he idolized Lamennais as a "saint" and dedicated several works

³³⁹ *Essay on Indifference Toward Religion.*

³⁴⁰ *On the Progress of the Revolution and the War Against the Church.*

³⁴¹ George Brandes, *Main currents in Nineteenth Century Literature, Volume 3, Revolution and Reaction in Nineteenth Century French Literature* (New York: Russell & Russell, unknown publication date), 269.

to the *abbé* (a title which would ultimately apply to Liszt himself).³⁴² Despite the differences of opinion which separated Wagner and Liszt on religious matters, their sensibilities were otherwise much in accord, and the indirect influence of Lamennais on Wagner through Liszt should not be discounted.

The *Dresdener Journal*, an official governmental publication, had detected the influence of Lamennais on the composer in its reaction to Wagner's *Vaterlandsverein* speech, describing it as "this beautiful imaginative picture, which reminds us of Lamartine, and at times too of Lamennais, but is certainly fuller of problems than of their solution. Among the cold reasoners of the Fatherland Club, the politics of the romantic poet and composer of *Tannhäuser* present a strange appearance."³⁴³

Alphonse de Lamartine was a poet and politician who played a key role in the French revolution of 1848. Wagner describes reading his *Histoire des Girondins* in several places in *Mein Leben*.³⁴⁴ As was the case with Lamennais, Wagner may have also come into contact with Lamartine by way of Liszt, who based his symphonic poem *Les préludes* in part on an ode from Lamartine's 1823 *Nouvelles méditations poétiques*. Lamartine's revolutionism was of a more moderate sort than Wagner's, though, as his valorization of the Girondins might suggest. Nevertheless, Lamartine served as Foreign Minister in the French provisional government of 1848, which he did much to help found. Both Lamennais and Lamartine shared Wagner's (and

³⁴² One of these works was "his socialistic march *Lyon*, inspired by the revolt of the silkworkers of that city. It bears the motto 'To live working, or to die fighting.'" *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Liszt, Franz, §4: The death of Adam Liszt."

³⁴³ Qtd. Carl Friedrich Glasenapp, *Life of Richard Wagner*, vol. 2, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1902), 246, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=2uYsAAAAYAAJ>.

³⁴⁴ Wagner, *My Life* (1911), 509 and 539.

Liszt's) vision of the reformation of society through art.³⁴⁵ Lamartine's case represented the actualization of this vision through the elevation of the artist (i.e., Lamartine himself) to actual governance, which Wagner unsuccessfully sought to emulate in Dresden in 1849.

Whitehouse describes Lamartine as a “nominal Catholic” who “had detached himself from the traditional dogma of the Church. It was the ‘historical Jesus’ he accepted, not the second Member of the Trinity.”³⁴⁶ Lamartine's religious philosophy could be summarized by the phrase, “Plus il fait jour, mieux on voit Dieu!”³⁴⁷ – “More it is day, better one sees God” – implying a metaphorical endorsement of the Enlightenment and strong emphasis on the efficacy of reason in comprehending the divine.³⁴⁸ Though the protagonist of Wagner's *Jesus von Nazareth* is less “historical” than ideological, his doctrines are presented as the result rational conviction rather than as dogma.

Wagner was clearly heavily involved in the intellectual currents of his day, and he displayed both remarkable extraversion and introversion in his cultivation of numerous conversational and cultural contacts while simultaneously reading widely and voraciously. The

³⁴⁵ Kenneth Hamilton, *The Oxford Companion to Music*, s.v. “Liszt, Franz,” (Oxford University Press), accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e4010>. This was indeed a general hallmark of what Franz Brendel called the *Neudeutsche Schule* of music, to which both Wagner and Liszt belonged.

³⁴⁶ Henry Remsen Whitehouse, *The Life of Lamartine*, vol. 2 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1918), 462, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=K8MaAAAAYAAJ>.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Cf. with Goethe's reputed last words, the celebrated “Mehr Licht! (More light!)” This utterance may be related to Goethe's claimed religious conversion in the last year of his life to Hysistarianism, an uncertain ancient sect of Asia Minor which seems to have worshipped the “most high” (ὑψιστος) God in an abstract sense, eclectically combining elements Christianity, Judaism, and Hellenism, as recorded by the Cappadocian Fathers. Though opposing Judaism, Wagner likewise was heterodox in his religious appropriations and tended to view divinity abstractly, in opposition to the concrete humanity of Jesus.

influences on his thinking were varied and vast, and the course of his own life suggests that they were internally filtered and funneled into a kind of tipping point which was eventually manifested in Wagner's participation in the abortive Dresden uprising of 1849. This event indeed provides a convenient moment in which Wagner's life can be bifurcated, and it is no accident that *Jesus von Nazareth* was written at the same time and seems to function as cumulative culmination and distillation of Wagner's revolutionary fervor, which would afterward dissipate in parallel with his growing Schopenhauerianism. Nevertheless, despite his plentiful external influences, one should recall and give credence to Wagner's own account of the origins of *Jesus von Nazareth* as "inspired by a recent reading of the Gospels."³⁴⁹ *Jesus von Nazareth* was, like all of Wagner's works, ultimately the actualized product of his own fecund imagination.

³⁴⁹ Wagner, *My Life* (1983), 389.

Part II

Jesus von Nazareth

“ἰδοὺ ὁ ἄνθρωπος.”³⁵⁰

Chapter 4: General Outline of the Work

Historiography

The corpus of Wagnerian commentary is vast. This stems in equal measure from the composer’s historical impact, his musical importance, and his status as a flashpoint of controversy. This thesis will therefore limit its historiographic survey primarily to commentators who have focused directly on *Jesus von Nazareth*, the literature of which is scant, and to some extent on Wagner’s Christological outlook more generally.

While most references to *Jesus von Nazareth* have been made in passing in the context of broader studies, there has been at least one full-length analysis of the work, Paul-Gerhard Graap’s 1920 dissertation at the University of Marburg. Entitled “Richard Wagners dramatischer Entwurf: ‘Jesus von Nazareth.’ Entstehungsgeschichte und Versuch einer Kurzen Würdigung,” it is primarily an examination of the influences at work on Wagner at the time of *Jesus von Nazareth*’s creation.³⁵¹ Graap divides these influences into an “outer” and an “inner” history of origins, focusing almost entirely on the latter, which for him consist of the *Junges Deutschland*

³⁵⁰ From John 19:5. “Behold the man!” (English Standard Version) or “Sehet, welch ein Mensch!” in Luther’s parlance. Cf. the title of Nietzsche’s autobiographical *Ecce Homo*.

³⁵¹ “Richard Wagner’s Dramatic Sketch ‘Jesus von Nazareth.’ A History of its Origins and Attempt at a Short Appreciation.” See Paul-Gerhard Graap, “Richard Wagners dramatischer Entwurf: ‘Jesus von Nazareth.’ Entstehungsgeschichte und Versuch einer Kurzen Würdigung” (Marburg: Lehmann & Bernhard Verlagsbuchdruckerei, 1920).

movement; “Die revolutionären Strömungen” (the revolutionary currents); Röckel, Bakunin, and Ruge; Proudhon and Lammenais; Weitling; and Feuerbach. Many of Graap’s insights have aided in the analysis of the origins of *Jesus von Nazareth* undertaken in the previous chapter. Of particular note here is the strong concurrence that Graap identifies between Wagner in *Jesus von Nazareth* and Weitling, as the latter has otherwise been a somewhat neglected historical figure. According to Graap, both men agreed “daß alles Unheil in die Welt gekommen sei dadurch, daß die Menschheit abgewichen sei vom Gesetz der Natur. Der Mensch ist von Natur eigentlich gut, aber durch die Gesellschaft ist er verderbt.”³⁵² Given that Weitling’s sources of inspiration were largely French, it is unsurprising to hear this essentially Rousseauian conception of human nature.³⁵³

Graap also reports that Wagner, in his own words, found “die heutige moderne Welt von einer ähnlichen Nichtswürdigkeit als die damals Jesus umgebende erfüllt.”³⁵⁴ He finds other themes in Wagner’s contemporary writings that would echo in *Jesus von Nazareth*: “So halten wir es nun, daß der Mensch gerecht werde, ohne des Gesetzes Werke, allein durch die Liebe.”³⁵⁵

³⁵² Graap, 59. “... that all evil that has come into the world thusly, that mankind has departed from the law of nature. Man by nature is really good, but he is corrupted by society.”

³⁵³ Rousseau, on the other hand, had claimed that the followers of Jesus would not make good citizens as their otherworldliness made them apolitical. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Rousseau on Philosophy, Morality, and Religion*, ed. Christopher Kelly (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth College Press, 2007), xxii.

³⁵⁴ Graap, 23. “...the present-day modern world is filled with a similar worthlessness as the one then surrounding Jesus.”

³⁵⁵ Ibid. Graap’s text here differs from the original German edition of *Jesus von Nazareth*, which employs “Werk” and “alleine” instead of “Werke” and “allein.” The original edition also places “Liebe” in parenthesis. Since Graap’s usages are probably closer to the original biblical text (see discussion of Romans 3:28 below), it appears that later editions may have corrected this. (In his “Literaturverzeichnis,” it appears that Graap cites Richard Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen in zehn Bänden*, ed. Wolfgang Golther, [Berlin: Bong, Goldene Klassiker-Bibliothek, 1914], although this date of publication is inferred. However, the spelling of this passage remains the same in e.g., Richard Wagner, *Jesus von Nazareth: Ein Dichterischer Entwurf* [Leipzig: Insel, 1914], 67. The original German version cited throughout this thesis is Richard Wagner, *Jesus von Nazareth. Ein Dichterischer Entwurf aus dem Jahre 1848* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1887), accessed November 27, 2013, <https://archive.org/details/jesuvonnazareth00wagn>, 92.

Although Graap does not elucidate this point, this last quotation is in fact a clever manipulation of Luther's translation of Romans 3:28, which reads, "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law."³⁵⁶ Wagner substitutes "Liebe" – "love" for "Glauben" – "faith." Love, a key theme in all of his works, is never more prominent as a means of justification than in *Jesus von Nazareth*.

In arriving at his "appreciation" of *Jesus von Nazareth*, Graap comments that Wagner himself admitted "eine Hauptschwäche seines Entwurfs, nämlich daß er entschieden tendenziösen Charakters und inhaltlich viel zu weit vom wahren Wesen des Christentums entfernt ist."³⁵⁷ (This is a clearly ironic reference to Feuerbach's *Das Wesen des Christentums*.) Such an admission should not necessarily surprise us given the tendentious nature of the work itself. And in his other operas, Wagner's characterization has generally not been praised as humanizing, in that each character is always fully-formed; while many of his characters do show strong development, one gets the sense that it is the ideas behind them rather than their personalities that truly give them their identities. This phenomenon is on full display on *Jesus von Nazareth*. It is mitigated to some extent by the "rounding" and abstracting component of the music in Wagner's other music dramas. Since *Jesus von Nazareth* was unfinished and nearly entirely uncomposed, it is not possible for us to judge the relative effectiveness of its potential music in modulating Wagner's tendentiousness.

Graap's observation of the fairly vast gulf that separates Wagner's thinking in *Jesus von Nazareth* from true Christianity, or at least the orthodox perception thereof, reminds us that there

³⁵⁶ New American Standard Bible.

³⁵⁷ Graap, 81. "...a principle weakness of his project, namely that it is decidedly tendentious in character and in content much too far removed from the true essence of Christianity." This admission by Wagner appears in his *Eine Mittheilung an meine Freunde*, discussed below.

is a predominate school of thought which avers, probably correctly, that Wagner's religious faith was not genuine, and that his use of religion, and particularly of Christianity, constituted an act of dramatic symbolism rather than one of faith. This school situates Wagner's employment of religion as a means to a dramatic end. Wagner's own writings reveal religion to have served a rhetorical end for him as well, including as a justification for his noted and odious anti-Semitism.³⁵⁸ An early and prominent advocate of this position is Heinrich Weinel, writing in 1903.³⁵⁹ He primarily examines Wagner's Christianity in as expressed in *Parsifal* and his late theoretical writings, wherein he finds some overlap between Wagner's renunciatory Buddhist Schopenhauerianism of that period and the message of Jesus, but ultimately discerns irreconcilable incongruence.³⁶⁰ Though he somewhat questionably places Wagner's composition of *Jesus von Nazareth* in the year 1847, he correctly identifies the work's main themes as love, opposition to the law, and opposition to property.³⁶¹ Weinel in fact elsewhere examines Wagner's Jesus as a manifestation of "utopistische[r] Kommunismus."³⁶²

And though he finds pantheistic overtones in Wagner's spirituality, Graap maintains that "I am thoroughly convinced that, in spite of all contradictory features, the Wagner who manifests himself in *Jesus von Nazareth* stands nearer the historical Jesus than does Wagner, the disciple of Schopenhauer."³⁶³ Nevertheless, Wagner's Jesus remains "an ethical political reformer – a rôle

³⁵⁸ E.g., in *Religion und Kunst*, as discussed below.

³⁵⁹ Heinrich Weinel, "Wagner and Christianity," *The American Journal of Theology*, vol. 7, no. 4, (Oct., 1903): 609-634, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3153756>.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 625.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 628-629.

³⁶² "utopian communism." See Heinrich Weinel, *Jesus im neunzehnten Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr, 1904), 115, accessed November 27, 2013, http://books.google.com/books?id=DRo_AAAAYAAJ.

³⁶³ Weinel, "Wagner and Christianity," 630.

which the historical Jesus never adopted or sought to adopt,” and despite the genuine love his Jesus exhibits, Wagner’s divergence from the spirit of Christianity ultimately “lies in the fact that he manifests no trace of the *religion* of Jesus.”³⁶⁴

Even if Wagner’s relationship with religion was as utilitarian as postulated by Weinel, it still no doubt served him well in fulfilling purely dramatic aims. The religiosity of contemporary nineteenth-century Wagnerian audiences cannot be discounted, and in fact increased in the decades following Wagner’s death. *Parsifal* serves as an illustrative case in point, as a tradition developed wherein *Parsifal* became associated with Holy Week performances.³⁶⁵ The overlaying of Wagner’s Paschal symbolism in *Parsifal* onto the actual lived experience of Easter thus completed the synergy in which religious allegory and actuality mutually reinforced and enhanced one another. This perspective is in line with art as an amplifier and reviver of religion rather than as its replacement – though the line could be frequently and perilously thin. What is one to make of Hitler’s purported statement to the effect the he would create a new religion out of *Parsifal*, for example?³⁶⁶

There is also a strong argument to be made from analogy with the mythological symbolism of Wagner’s celebrated *Ring des Nibelungen*. Wagner’s use of Germanic mythology in the *Ring* cycle was indeed *qua* mythology rather than as literal religion; it is therefore almost

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 630-631.

³⁶⁵ This phenomenon was not merely limited to Germany (where Wagner and his descendants had attempted with varying and diminishing success to prohibit the staging of *Parsifal* outside of Bayreuth), but extended also to houses such as the New York Metropolitan Opera, continuing even after World War Two. For example, “The Metropolitan traditionally presented *Parsifal* each spring, as close to Holy Week as its schedule would permit. Tradition was served by three performances in March and April 1949...” (Philip Hart, *Fritz Reiner: A Biography* [Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1994], 130.)

³⁶⁶ “Out of *Parsifal* I shall make for myself a religion, religious service in solemn form without theological disputation.” Qtd. in Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*, 236. Spotts cites the memoirs of the Nazi potentate Hans Frank, who was also Hitler’s personal attorney, *Im Angesicht des Galgens*, (München-Gräfelfing: F.A. Beck, 1953), 213.

nowhere suggested that Wagner had thereby intended a literal pagan religious revival. Wagner's willingness to dip indiscriminately into a grab-bag of religious cultural heritage – Germanic, Buddhist, Celtic, and Christian – reinforces his utilitarian purpose.³⁶⁷ If mythology is thought of as symbolic tropes rather than the actualization of the supernatural, then Wagner's treatment of Christianity frequently differed little from his treatment of other religious traditions.

Chronologically speaking, one of the first to comment on *Jesus of Nazareth* was naturally the translator of Wagner's prose corpus, William Ashton Ellis. He sees it as an entirely theoretical work, expressing repeatedly his opinion that “there can be little doubt that this ‘poetic sketch’ of *Jesus of Nazareth* was not intended for a musical setting,”³⁶⁸ despite Wagner's hints of intentions in this direction, and further that its various choral segments suggest that Wagner had not conceived the work as “intended for regular musical composition.”³⁶⁹ Ashton Ellis does perceptively note that Wagner had finished the composition of *Lohengrin* only months previous to writing *Jesus von Nazareth*, and since that work marks the closure of the middle period of Wagner's compositional style, his *Jesus* is the product of a temporary flight from music. Curiously, though, the implication that *Jesus von Nazareth* would be too “choral” of a work to have been completed is puzzling in light of the heavily choral composition of *Lohengrin* itself.

Another early study of which includes *Jesus von Nazareth* is Karl Heckel's examination of the origins of *Parsifal* in the *Bayreuther Blätter* in 1896.³⁷⁰ Heckel was essentially the first to identify the influence of both *Jesus von Nazareth* and Wagner's *Die Sieger* on *Parsifal*. Weinel

³⁶⁷ Cf. also *Tristan und Isolde* and the uncompleted *Wieland der Schmied* and *Die Sieger*.

³⁶⁸ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth and Other Writings*, xv.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, xvi.

³⁷⁰ Karl Heckel, “Jesus of Nazareth - Buddha (The Victors) – Parsifal,” trans. Derrick Everett, *Bayreuther Blätter*, 1896, 5-19, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.monsalvat.no/nazareth.htm>.

particularly is interested in the similarities between Wagner's treatment of the characters of Kundry in *Parsifal* and Mary Magdalene in *Jesus von Nazareth*; both are fallen women who are accorded a special confidence by the works' respective protagonists. Nevertheless, Heckel, in his attempt to connect *Jesus von Nazareth* with Wagner's later works, is apt to ignore the drama's fundamentally Young Hegelian character by dubiously interweaving quotations from Wagner's mature output as if they represented Wagner's views in 1848.

Wagner's early biographer Houston Stewart Chamberlain, a racial theorist who idolized the Bayreuth master, uses the very existence of *Jesus von Nazareth*, somewhat inaccurately described as "a glorification of the divine person of the Saviour," to defend his subject from allegations of irreligion;³⁷¹ however, Chamberlain's assertion of Wagner's copious scriptural citations as "bearing witness to a very close study of the sacred writings" comes off as a flawed analysis in light of what will be demonstrated to be Wagner's numerous intentional (as well as at times apparently unintentional) exegetical obfuscations thereof.³⁷² Chamberlain also endeavors to minimize the effect on Wagner of Feuerbach, whose "influence was not deep;" he also disputes that Wagner had encountered Feuerbach's works at the time of his writing of *Jesus von Nazareth. Parsifal*, furthermore, "has simply cast off all the dogmatic and historic Christianity of *Jesus von Nazareth*;"³⁷³ while Wagner's aim in *Jesus von Nazareth* itself is "the negation of

³⁷¹ Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Richard Wagner*, trans. G. Ainslie Hight (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1900), 133. In a note on page 272, Chamberlain also directs the reader's attention to chapter three of Hébert's *Le sentiment religieux dans l'œuvre de Richard Wagner* and page 44 of Muncker's *Richard Wagner* for further analysis of *Jesus von Nazareth*. The former author, a Catholic priest, apparently refutes the notion of *Jesus von Nazareth* as merely an "anarchist drama," while the later praises *Jesus von Nazareth* as "a drama which could not but exercise a powerful moral, poetic, and dramatic influence ." (See Marcel Hébert, *Le sentiment religieux dans l'œuvre de Richard Wagner* [Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1895], accessed November 27, 2013, <http://archive.org/details/3347414> , and Franz Muncker, *Richard Wagner, eine Skizze seines Lebens und Wirkens* [Bamberg: Buchnersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1891], accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=AbU5AAAAIAAJ>.)

³⁷² Chamberlain (1900), *Richard Wagner*, 272.

³⁷³ Ibid., 297.

loveless humanity.”³⁷⁴ (As has been demonstrated, describing Wagner’s Christianity as “dogmatic and historic” in 1848 is a rather dubious claim.) Nevertheless, Chamberlain rates *Jesus von Nazareth* “to be of far more importance than is generally supposed, for it enabled Wagner to realize the enhancement of poetic expression possible in the word-tone-drama;” this last phrase appears to be a reference to Wagner’s movement away from conventional opera and toward his “music drama” *Gesamtkunstwerk* concept. Chamberlain elsewhere continues to do all he can to buttress the argument hinted at by Wagner in *Jesus von Nazareth* and made more explicit in his later works that Jesus was not Jewish, or at least that significant doubt surrounds the question.

Carl Engel depicts *Jesus von Nazareth* as emblematic of the artificiality of Wagner’s religious principles and his willingness to subsume spirituality under the higher purpose of his own dramatic ends:

The only frenzy that Wagner never knew was the religious fervor born of implicit religious faith. He was full of passion, but void of compassion. He never experienced the rapture and contrition of Bach or Franck.³⁷⁵ He believed in himself. His wisdom was the fruit of selfish struggle, not of a man “*durch Mitleid wissend*.”³⁷⁶ For a long time he had been an avowed atheist. Christ interested him as a dramatic personage. In 1848 Wagner sketched a play with the title “Jesus of Nazareth.” He dropped the plan. Later in life the mysticism of the Christian legends appealed to him. But it was only a superficial and perhaps a superstitious concern. His mystico-symbolical “Parsifal” is first and last a musical spectacle, not a spiritual revelation. It is theatrical religion; or the Christian Heaven done over by the man who undertook to renovate Valhalla.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 276.

³⁷⁵ César Franck (1822-1890) was a Belgian organist, pianist, composer and music professor who was a devoted Roman Catholic in much the same way as Bach had represented the fullest expression of musical Protestantism.

³⁷⁶ “Enlightened through compassion,” the means through which the eponymous hero of Wagner’s *Parsifal* achieves his redemptive power.

³⁷⁷ Carl Engel, “Die Wagnerdämmerung,” *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 3, (Jul., 1928): 444, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/738440>.

Though Engel's "Valhalla" observation is made in the context of Parsifal, the coterie of bickering disciples surrounding Christ in *Jesus von Nazareth* does indeed bear some resemblance to the scheming of the various gods of Wagner's *Ring* cycle.

In the editorial material accompanying his edition of Wagner's letters, Millington, along with his co-editor Stewart Spencer, repeats the consensus assessment of *Jesus von Nazareth* as the result of a blend of Feuerbach and Proudhon's ideas, though its anarchism was "characteristic of Wagner's own thinking at this time."³⁷⁸ Millington and Spencer go on to present an interesting hypothesis that interprets *Jesus von Nazareth* as a whole, but particularly its invalidation of marriage-as-property, in light of Wagner's affair, beginning in March 1850, with Jessie Laussot, an Englishwoman unhappily married to a Bordeaux wine merchant.³⁷⁹

Various other authors have commented in passing on *Jesus von Nazareth* from a diverse variety perspectives. Paul Lawrence Rose, as noted above, argues that anti-Semitism is not directly expressed in *Jesus von Nazareth* because it is implicit within the argument of the work. Rose's overall thesis is that Wagner represents the intellectual nexus through which socialist revolution is racialized. Martin Gregor-Dellin speculates on that *Jesus von Nazareth* may have been the product of Strauss's or Weitling's influence (via Röckel), though he states that these hypotheses remain unproven.³⁸⁰ Ernst Rose calls Wagner's Jesus "einen Empörer gegen das Eigentumsrecht und die Zwangsehe."³⁸¹ He contrasts Wagner's Christ-project with that of the

³⁷⁸ Wagner, *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, 161.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 159.

³⁸⁰ Gregor-Dellin, *Richard Wagner: His Life, His Work, His Century*, 161.

³⁸¹ "... a rebel against the right of property and forced marriage." Ernst Rose, "Das erste moderne Christusdrama der Deutschen Literatur," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 23, no. 4 (Oct., 1924): 492, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27702820>.

contemporary author Otto Ludwig, who sees Jesus as merely “ein reiner Mensch” in contrast to Wagner’s “ethisch-sozialer Revolutionär.”³⁸² Patrick Kavanaugh, though he confuses the chronology of Wagner’s drafting of *Jesus von Nazareth*, nevertheless describes it as a “dramatic harmony of the Gospel accounts” and laments Wagner’s abandonment of “what could have been an important sacred work.”³⁸³ Slavoj Žižek describes *Jesus von Nazareth* as “*Parsifal* written directly, without the long detour through the *Ring*.”³⁸⁴ He repackages Wagner’s antinomianism as a Proudhonian quip analogous to “property is theft.” “marriage is adultery.” Wagner’s Jesus ultimately proposes a “negation of [Hegelian] negation,” which is “the shift from the idea that we are violating some natural balanced order to the idea that imposing on the Real such a notion of balanced order is in itself the greatest violation.”³⁸⁵ Compare this to Proudhon’s maxim, “La négation est la condition préalable de l’affirmation.”³⁸⁶

To conclude, the historiographical landscape of *Jesus von Nazareth* is relatively thin in terms of dedicated analyses. Other than Graap, all of the scholars mentioned above have examined *Jesus von Nazareth* only cursorily, with the work functioning either as merely one component in the elucidation of more general themes within Wagner’s better-known works, or as a means to the end of theoretical axe-grinding. Graap has been the only scholar to undertake a thorough analysis of the work. Even his efforts, however, are dedicated primarily to charting

³⁸² Ibid. “a pure man” ... “ethical and social revolutionary.”

³⁸³ Patrick Kavanaugh, *Spiritual Lives of the Great Composers* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996), 105.

³⁸⁴ Slavoj Žižek, “Christ, Hegel, Wagner,” *International Journal of Žižek Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2: 7, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://zizekstudies.org/index.php/ijzs/article/download/41/64>. Despite the overwhelming consensus that *Parsifal* is a Schopenhauerian work, Žižek characterizes its “final message is a profoundly Hegelian one: The wound can be healed only by the spear that smote it (*Die Wunde schliesst der Speer nur der sie schlug*);” for Hegel, “the Spirit is itself the wound it tries to heal, i.e., the wound is self-inflicted.” (Ibid., 9.)

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 9.

³⁸⁶ “Negation is the precondition of affirmation.” Qtd. in Chamberlain (1900), *Richard Wagner*, 175-176.

Wagner's intellectual development in leading to drafting *Jesus von Nazareth*, and while he is exemplary in this regard, his analysis of the document itself is an afterthought. The following sections of this thesis seek to rectify this historiographical lacuna.

Structure

Wagner's *Jesus von Nazareth* is initially intriguing for the implications of its title. The appellation "of Nazareth" as opposed to "Christ" suggests an attempt at both a humanizing and historicizing treatment. As we shall see in his later *Religion und Kunst*, Wagner placed Jesus's specific geographical origin under a great deal of scrutiny. In particular, he would come to believe in the symbolic importance of Jesus's having arisen from among the Galileans, whom he identified as reviled among the Jews themselves for their lowly heritage.³⁸⁷ Wagner assumed this "impure" origin to hint at an admixture of Aryan blood, or at least non-Semitic descent.³⁸⁸ In any event, Wagner certainly looked upon Jesus' ethnic background as an enhancement of the standard Christian trope emphasizing the lowliness of his birth, contrasted, of course, with the incomparable highness of his calling and of his redemptive mission. He also identified the stress laid upon Jesus's lineage from the house of David as a compensatory mechanism in this regard.³⁸⁹

However, Wagner also sets the scene by the Lake of Gennesaret (better known as the Sea of Galilee) with Jesus explaining his mission to his mother Mary in the following manner: "Jesus upon his youth, his baptism by John, his sojourn in the wilderness; there did his task grow clear

³⁸⁷ Wagner, *Religion and Art*, 233.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

to him, he embraced it not as David's scion, but as the son of God."³⁹⁰ We again see this line of thinking in *Religion und Kunst*, where Wagner similarly downplays Jesus' Davidian lineage as a Jewish invention and stresses his actual Godhood. Jesus' divinity would ultimately come to be his most important distinguishing and justifying characteristic in Wagner's mind, as it should be. Though Wagner may have wavered in this regard during the period surrounding the composition of *Jesus von Nazareth*, he finally came to accept the divinity of Jesus as the firmest and in fact only foundation on which to base Christian belief, and in this manner at least he was in accord with orthodox Christianity.

The text of *Jesus von Nazareth* is divided into three sections.³⁹¹ In the table of contents of the 1887 German edition published by Wagner's son Siegfried, these are demarcated as "I. Dichterischer Entwurf" ("Poetic Draft"), "II. Ausführungen" ("Explanations" or "Arguments"), and "III. Citate" ("Citations").³⁹² The first section consists of Wagner's prose draft of the action of the drama. It is framed in a five act structure, superficially akin to that of the French grand operatic tradition, and indeed to that of Wagner's own *Rienzi*, composed approximately a decade prior. Wagner's mature music dramas, in contrast, adhere for the most part to a three-act form. Wagner's discussion of *Jesus von Nazareth* in a letter of August 9, 1849, to Uhlig is in fact largely concerned with the unsuitability of the work for the conventions of the Parisian stage, despite its five-act structure:

³⁹⁰ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 287.

³⁹¹ There does not appear to be any evidence that Wagner consciously intended this division *in partes tres* to carry any Trinitarian implications or to have had any other numerological or "dialectical" significance.

³⁹² Wagner, *Jesus von Nazareth* (1887). Siegfried Wagner dedicated the work to the memory of his recently deceased tutor Heinrich von Stein, who was also a close associate of Nietzsche's. Though Richard Wagner himself was also very fond of him, von Stein does not appear to have any other appreciable connection with *Jesus von Nazareth*. The modern German equivalent of *Citate* would be *Zitate*.

Now besides my Siegfried, I have in my head two tragic and two comic subjects, but not one of them would suit the French stage: I have also a fifth, and I care not in what language it is presented to the world—Jesus of Nazareth. I think of offering this subject to the Frenchman,³⁹³ and hope thus to be rid of the whole matter, for I can guess the dismay which this poem will cause to my *associé*. If he have the courage to hold up against the thousand conflicts which the proposition to treat such a subject for the theatre will cause, I shall look upon it as fate and set to work. If he abandon me, all the better: I am then freed from all temptation to work in the hateful jabbering language; for with my disposition, you can easily imagine that only with the greatest repugnance should I set to work on such a mishmash: if I do it will be out of consideration for my creditors to whom I should make over the French fees.³⁹⁴

How ironic that Wagner, who was perpetually indebted, would consider pursuing the production of an avowedly anti-materialist work in order to resolve his own pecuniary predicament. Given Wagner's clear antipathy for Gallic culture, it is remarkable that he would consider putting forward *Jesus von Nazareth* in order to fulfill his post-revolutionary desperation to get a work produced by the Paris *Opéra*.³⁹⁵ In another 1850 letter to Uhlig, for example, Wagner channels Bakunin in his declaration, "With complete level-headedness and with no sense of dizziness, I assure you that I no longer believe in any other revolution save that which begins with the burning down of Paris."³⁹⁶ His disillusionment with the productive prospects of *Jesus von Nazareth*, if not yet with the work itself, and thus his desire "to be rid of the matter," was fairly rapid after the political failure of the Dresden uprising.

This again reminds us of the uncertainties of the exact time frame of Wagner's work on *Jesus von Nazareth*. Translator William Ashton Ellis places it between "November 1848 and the

³⁹³ "The Frenchman" mentioned by Wagner is in fact Gustave Vaëz, his Belgian librettist acquaintance.

³⁹⁴ Richard Wagner, *Richard Wagner's Letters to his Dresden Friends, Theodor Uhlig, Wilhelm Fischer, and Ferdinand Heine*, trans. J. S. Sheldock (New York: Scribner and Welford, 1890), letter to Uhlig of August 9, 1849, no. 1, 2, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=qsdOAAAAMAAJ>. Original German text available in Richard Wagner, *Richard Wagner's Briefe an Theodor Uhlig, Wilhelm Fischer, Ferdinand Heine*, letter to Uhlig of August 9, 1849, no. 1, 5-6.

³⁹⁵ Wagner eventually offered Vaëz his *Wieland der Schmied*, which he never completed. Wagner was ultimately able to get *Tannhäuser* performed by the *Opéra* in 1861, but the result was a fiasco due to what Parisian sensibilities was the ill-timing of the work's ballet in Act I, as noted above.

³⁹⁶ Wagner, *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, letter to Uhlig of October 22, 1850, no. 117, 219.

early part of 1849 – in all probability before the Christmas of that winter.”³⁹⁷ Nevertheless, Ashton Ellis judges that the “phraseology” of the work’s second section, as well as the August 1849 letter to Uhlig, mean that at least this middle section was written in between *Die Kunst und die Revolution* and *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*; i.e., in mid to late 1849.³⁹⁸ There is also the matter of Wagner’s previously-discussed letter to Ferdinand Heine, where the composer alludes to “elaborating” on *Jesus von Nazareth* in Zurich in November 1849; though again, some scholars have dismissed this.³⁹⁹ Further counterbalancing this supposition, and perhaps decisively so, is Ashton Ellis’s revelation, referring to the undated original manuscript, that “my authority tells me that it is all contained in one note-book in the order in which it has been printed,” which would seem to suggest that it was written in straight through without later additions.⁴⁰⁰ Muncker, and early posthumous biographer of the composer, writes in 1891 that “noch im Herbst 1848 entwarf er einen »Jesus von Nazareth« in fünf Akten.”⁴⁰¹ Given the balance of evidence which makes conceivable Wagner’s encounter of Feuerbach’s ideas before or during his time in Dresden, the potential objection that Wagner had a tendency toward continual revision of his works over lengthy timeframes is dealt with when one realizes that this manner of working applies primarily to his finished operas and a few of his more prominent essays. The most probable conclusion, then, is that Wagner had largely written what is extant of *Jesus von Nazareth* before his flight from Dresden, if not quite as early as Ashton Ellis

³⁹⁷ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 284.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ Wagner, *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, letter to Ferdinand Heine of November 19, 1849, no. 96, 177, note 2.

⁴⁰⁰ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 284.

⁴⁰¹ Muncker, 44. “...in the fall of 1848, he drafted a ‘Jesus of Nazareth’ in five acts.”

speculates. (There are apparently a few minor musical sketches which survive from *Jesus von Nazareth*, but these have not been published or even described in the literature.)⁴⁰² In any event, even if he later did resume work on *Jesus von Nazareth*, Wagner was indeed most likely finally “rid of the matter” no later than the end of 1849 or by 1850 at the latest.

The first section of Wagner’s *Jesus* draft consists of the narrative of the drama itself. It is more in the form of an extended précis than a fleshed-out libretto. It is essentially a summary of the dramatic action on which Wagner intended to focus and does not contain anything resembling worked-out lines of dialogue. In short, it is nowhere near complete enough to constitute a “poem,” as Wagner referred to the finished prose drafts of his other operatic texts.

The second section comprises theoretical musings intended to undergird the drama. This philosophical brainstorming, as it were, is accompanied by citations, sometimes unclear, indicating a corresponding segment of the drama to further be fleshed out (“for Act IV,” etc.). Much of the Wagner’s theorizing here has little *prima facie* connection to the drama itself. Connections, at times tenuous, can be arrived at through analysis, but in any event, this second section does provide a good window into Wagner’s philosophical thought processes.

The third component of the draft is a selection of scriptural citations indexed by act to the drama itself in the manner of the second section. Wagner’s method here is largely to select a given Gospel and to proceed through it on a chapter-by-chapter basis, choosing to highlight verses appropriate to his dramatic purposes. In this he adheres to the time-honored method of selective scriptural exegesis, which is to say he relentlessly focuses on verses which support his own position while omitting those that undermine it. Wagner is by no means interested in

⁴⁰² Saffle, 315-316.

discerning a comprehensive and coherent *Sitz im Leben* (“setting in life”) for the scriptures that he cites.

Plot Summary

The plot of *Jesus von Nazareth* can be summarized as follows. Act I is set in Tiberias in Galilee. Judas discusses Jesus with Barabbas and the possibilities for revolt against the Romans. Jesus appears at the house of a publican and heals his daughter who had been thought dead. Jesus is chastised by a Pharisee for the lowliness of his associations, and Barabbas also criticizes Jesus, who rebukes them both. Mary Magdalene is introduced as under threat of stoning by an unruly mob, and is acquitted and delivered by Jesus. Jesus then dines with his disciples, the publican’s family, and “persons from the Folk,” whom Jesus describes as his metaphorical family to close the act.⁴⁰³

Act II occurs by the Sea of Galilee.⁴⁰⁴ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus converse. The mother is initially suspicious of the Magdalene, but she relents after the latter humbly expresses her desire to serve Jesus and his “community.”⁴⁰⁵ Jesus then awakens and reminisces on his youth with his mother while making clear his mission and calling. Jesus’s brothers appear and, jealous of their mother’s attentions to Jesus, challenge him to go to Jerusalem and take leadership of the Folk.⁴⁰⁶ Jesus replies that they misapprehend his teachings.

⁴⁰³ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 287.

⁴⁰⁴ “Am See Genezareth.” Wagner, *Jesus von Nazareth* (1887), 5.

⁴⁰⁵ “Gemeinde.” See below for further discussion. *Ibid.*, 5-7.

⁴⁰⁶ Wagner does not clearly put forward a position on the lineage of Jesus’s brothers (δεσπόσωνοι). They are described as “sons of Joseph the carpenter” – “Jesus’ Brüder, – Joseph’s des Zimmermann’s Söhne,” and Wagner makes no comment regarding Mary’s involvement in their parentage. Given his general Protestant tendencies, one

Jesus's disciples, led by Judas, urge him to hurry to Jerusalem, and do not understand his mission. Jesus is approached by a rich young man who cannot bear to part with his possessions as the price of following Jesus. Jesus and his disciples board a boat while the Marys and other women distribute food to the people, to whom Jesus preaches on his ministry, and who disperse to meet him in Jerusalem.

Act III opens in Jerusalem with Pilate and Caiaphas discussing Barabbas's recently-quelled revolt, which failed due to the people's support of Jesus instead. Pilate is concerned that he has too few troops to keep the populace in check. Caiaphas and the Pharisees fear the threat that Jesus's demagogic powers represent to their own position. Jesus enters Jerusalem to the acclamation of the crowds, and upon arriving at the temple he upbraids and disperses the merchants profaning its entrance. The Pharisaical elders enter and dispute Jesus's authority; he denounces them and their law, declares himself the son of God, and describes the end of Jerusalem and the temple. The people, who had sought a messiah in the form of a sovereign, fall into confusion, during which Jesus disappears, and Judas converses with a Pharisee, observed by Mary Magdalene. After all have dispersed, Jesus reappears from the temple and is conducted by Mary Magdalene to the evening meal.

Act IV begins with the Last Supper. Judas and Mary Magdalene are set up in opposition to one another concerning the destiny of Jesus. Judas criticizes Mary Magdalene over her anointing Jesus; he is in turn reprimanded by Jesus for so doing. Judas subsequently departs. The disciples anxiously listen to Jesus expound his doctrines one last time. They depart after eating.

would expect him to reject the doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity. (Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth* 288, and Wagner, *Jesus von Nazareth* [1887], 6.)

Judas returns with armed men and confronts Mary Magdalene, who disclaims knowledge of Jesus's destination. Judas is forced to continue the search for Jesus under penalty of his life. The scene then changes to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus separates from his disciples in solitude. Upon Jesus's return, Judas arrives with the armed retinue and kisses Jesus. Peter strikes out at those seizing Jesus, who rebukes him; the disciples flee.

Act V commences outside Pilate's palace, at night, where Peter asks after Jesus among the Roman soldiers. Peter then proceeds to deny Jesus three times, and flees when Jesus is brought forth and calls his name. Jesus, despite their mockery, declares that Peter will be "a rock."⁴⁰⁷ At daybreak the Pharisees arrive and begin to influence the Folk in favor of Barabbas rather than Jesus; Pilate then emerges and declares Jesus guiltless. When Jesus states that he is the son of God, the crowd is led into cries of "Crucify him!"⁴⁰⁸ Pilate's wife, convinced by Mary Magdalene of Jesus's innocence, entreats Pilate to spare him. The tumult of the crowd continues, and Pilate, lamenting his lack of legions, is forced to release Barabbas and hand over Jesus for crucifixion, literally washing his hands of him.

John, Jesus's brothers, Peter, and the two Marys appear; Peter expresses great remorse and would fain die with Jesus, but is restrained. Jesus is brought forth, robed in purple and with a crown of thorns. The Pharisees and Pilate wrangle over an inscription declaring him the King of the Jews. Jesus is led off and makes his farewells and instructions to his disciples and followers. The same begin to assemble as the square empties, and Judas, staggering in, is denounced by Peter. The sky darkens and the weather worsens, Judas flees at the sight of approaching

⁴⁰⁷ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 294. Cf. Matthew 16:18, there rendered as "ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν"; "On this rock I will build my church."

⁴⁰⁸ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 295. Cf. Matthew 27:22, Mark 15:13, Luke 23:21, and John 19:15.

Pharisees, and the veil of the temple is torn in two. John and the two Marys return from the crucifixion.⁴⁰⁹ Peter, moved from despair to enthusiasm, preaches on Jesus's sacrifice, and the crowd rushes forward to demand baptism.⁴¹⁰

Analysis of the Drama

Wagner's plot outline is for the most part in accord with the basic story to be found in the Gospels, though it does contain several alterations, particularly in the compositing and condensing of events for the sake of brevity and clarity. Most of these occurrences are minor and are done for understandable dramaturgical purposes; however, there are a few that require individual comment.

It is immediately apparent that Wagner has stripped out any references to miracles in his accounting of Jesus, including omitting the two "bookend" events which otherwise most strongly would assert Jesus's divinity, namely the virgin birth and the resurrection. Such omission is a commonplace strategy in nearly all naturalistic Gospel retellings, including the latterly-famous *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth* by Thomas Jefferson.⁴¹¹ Also known as the *Jefferson Bible*, this was a privately-produced, posthumously-published cutting-and-pasting of the gospels which omits nearly any elements which could be conceived as supernatural. Though Wagner was

⁴⁰⁹ As will become apparent, Wagner for the most part attempts to limit his citations of scripture to the New Testament. However, there are several exceptions to this, both intentional and inadvertent. One exception may be found in Wagner's description of John's and the two Marys' remarks on their return from the crucifixion: "He hath fulfilled." (Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 297.) This is most likely a reference to Lamentations 2:17: "The LORD hath done that which he had devised; he hath fulfilled his word that he had commanded in the days of old." (King James Version). As with Wagner's other Old Testament references, this somewhat undercuts his attempt to bifurcate the New and Old Testaments and to insulate his Jesus from the latter.

⁴¹⁰ "The reception into the community." Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 297. Originally: "Aufnahme in die Gemeinde." (Wagner, *Jesus von Nazareth* [1887], 22.)

⁴¹¹ See Thomas Jefferson, *The Jefferson Bible: The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

obviously unaware of this work, the degree of plasticity with which Jefferson approaches the biblical narrative does mirror Wagner's own artistic approach.

Wagner does include the episode of the raising of the daughter of the publican (named in Luke and Mark as Jairus),⁴¹² though Ashton Ellis considers Wagner's account of Jesus's actions as having constituted "a natural recovery."⁴¹³ Jesus declares that Jairus's daughter only "sleepeth" and that she "is restored from a serious illness."⁴¹⁴ Jesus then contradicts Jairus's shock that Jesus has resurrected his child and "wakened it from death," responding, "What lived, I have preserved to life: open thine own heart, that *thee* I may awake from death!"⁴¹⁵ This moral conclusion is Wagner's own invention. However, the biblical sources do disagree on whether the child is dying or already dead. Matthew 9:18 declares that the daughter "just died (ἄρτι ἐτελεύτησεν / ist jetzt gestorben)," with the Greek aorist literally meaning "came to an end." Mark 5:23 says she "has extremity (ἐσχάτως ἔχει / ist in den letzten Zügen);" i.e., is at the point of death. Luke 8:42 says she "was dying (ἀπέθνησκεν / lag in den letzten Zügen)," with the imperfect implying that this remains an ongoing process. Nevertheless, even such a rapid and otherwise unexplained recovery from illness must be considered miraculous to some extent. On the other hand, Wagner does ignore Jesus's exhortations in Mark 5:43 and Luke 8:56 to maintain secrecy about what had occurred. William Wrede would later identify such statements by Jesus as constituting a "messianic secret" motif added by early Christian apologists to explain Jesus's reticence about openly proclaiming his Messiahship, though this could also be explained

⁴¹² Ἰάϊρος in Mark 5:22 and Luke 8:41.

⁴¹³ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, xviii.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 286.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

theologically in that the appointed time of Jesus's prophetic fulfillment had not yet arrived.⁴¹⁶ Wagner's wholesale avoidance of the issue clearly indicates his conception of a Messiah whose divinity is at the least not of the transcendent variety.

Wagner includes the episode in which the rich young man, offering himself to Jesus, is instructed by the same to sell all of his possessions and donate the resulting funds to "the commune," in Ashton Ellis' translation.⁴¹⁷ Wagner's original German here reads "Gemeinde." "Commune" is an acceptable translation, but "Gemeinde" can also refer to a congregation in religious contexts. We will see that Luther's translation of "ἐκκλησίαν" in Ephesians 5:29 is rendered as "Gemeinde," which Ashton Ellis there in turn translates as "communion," though "ἐκκλησίαν" more properly refers to those "called out," i.e., the Church.⁴¹⁸ Since Jesus's Apostles formed the original religious "Gemeinde" par excellence, one must question whether Ashton Ellis has perhaps overstated Wagner's socialistic tendencies here. "Commune" in English has the connotation of a communism in a more radical sense than should be derived from "Gemeinde" in a religious context.

Regardless of whether one prefers commune or congregation, either term constitutes an invention by Wagner in terms of Biblical source material. The Gospels all agree that the money is not to be given to the commune or congregation but rather to "the poor."⁴¹⁹ The Greek, πτωχοῖς in the dative, derives etymologically from πτωσσω, meaning "I crouch" or "cower,"

⁴¹⁶ See William Wrede, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien: zugleich ein Beitrag zum Verständnis des Markusevangeliums* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901), accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=kZ47AAAAAYAAJ>.

⁴¹⁷ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 288.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 327.

⁴¹⁹ Matthew 19:21, Mark 10:21, and Luke 18:22.

implying not just the indigent but the beggarly.⁴²⁰ Indeed, it implies “the pauper rather than the mere peasant, the extreme opposite of the rich.”⁴²¹ πτωχοῖς therefore appears to have been the term of choice for the evangelists due to the extreme contrast engendered with the rich young man.

Wagner’s change here from the poor to the commune also seems to have been undertaken for contrast, though of a different sort: that of the dramatic confrontation of Jesus and Judas. For Wagner has Judas respond to Jesus’s admonition and the subsequent departure of the rich young man with a protestation of seeming avarice: “Lord, bethink thee, he is very rich!” Jesus himself rejoins with “‘Verily I say unto you’ etc.; concerning the rich.” One can safely assume that the “etc.” refers to the well-known metaphor of the camel and the needle. But to return to Judas: as guardian of the Apostles’ finances he is here easily portrayed as materialistic in his pursuit of the rich young man’s money as a source of self-benefit, rather than the more innocuous and biblically-correct donation to the poor, thereby establishing tension with Jesus. In point of fact, the entirety of Judas’s response is an invention by Wagner, as is not mentioned in this context in any of the original scriptural accounts. The criticism of Wagner’s Judas seems to originate from the later scriptural episode in which the Apostles generally object to the perceived wastage of the expensive nard with which Jesus is anointed (in Wagner’s created account, by Mary Magdalene), on the grounds that it could have been sold to benefit the poor. In Wagner’s version of the

⁴²⁰ πτωχός is incidentally the same term used to describe “the poor in spirit” in the Beatitudes.

⁴²¹ Bible Hub, s.v. “4434. ptóchos” in *HELPS Word-studies*.

anointing, it is Judas who specifically objects, a version of events that is only supported by John's account.⁴²²

Finally, there is the consideration that Wagner did perhaps intend *Gemeinde* to mean the commune rather than the congregation. In that case, could he perhaps be referring to the community of the whole, of mankind, or of the believers, the *κοινωνία*? Given Wagner's valorization of the *Volk*, this is certainly possible. In that case, donation to the commune and to the poor may in fact constitute one and the same thing.

We also see that Wagner, immediately after this episode, has the two Marys, Jesus's mother and Magdalene, distribute bread and wine to "the multitude" on the shores of the sea.⁴²³ There is no biblical mention of either of the Marys having participated in this episode. As will be seen, Wagner greatly expanded the role played by Mary Magdalene. He does likewise, although to a lesser extent, with the Virgin Mary, including a confrontation with Jesus about the nature of his mission and ministry.⁴²⁴ It is possible that Wagner had in mind his own mother, who had passed away about a year previous.⁴²⁵ Though in part clearly an attempt to enhance the role of his drama's female characters, Wagner's specification of bread and wine quite literally does not adhere to the miracle of the loaves and *fishes*. Is this perhaps a Eucharistic foreshadowing on Wagner's part? And speaking of miracles, the incident is described in the plainest, most mundane, and non-miraculous terms, almost as a secular communal ritual, recalling e.g., Hegel's

⁴²² John 12:4-6. "But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, 'Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?' He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it."

⁴²³ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 288.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, 287-288.

⁴²⁵ January 9, 1848.

Leben Jesu in terms of tone. As noted, Wagner bandies about “*das Volk*” in the vaguest manner, as if society is one monolithic unit. Does he here attempt to make this “communion” of bread and wine, which is interceded through a woman, an immersion of the spirit into the *Volk*?

Wagner also tenuously dances about in terms of his vacillating support or opposition to elitism. The mass distribution of bread and wine in this scene recalls the Eucharistic “love feast” in Act I of *Parsifal*. This scene in *Parsifal* is traditionally interpreted as a condemnation of the elitism of a closed brotherhood and the decadence and degeneration of religion to the form of empty ritual. Prefiguring this, the aforementioned scene in *Jesus von Nazareth* clearly demonstrates the opening up of Jesus’s ministry to the entirety of the people, despite the continuing importance of his Apostles, particularly Peter, who in Act V carries on his legacy after his death. This is to say nothing, of course, of the elitism requisitely involved in the divinity and salvific necessity of Jesus himself.

Returning to Mary Magdalene, Wagner makes the extremely commonplace mistake of conflating her with the adulteress saved from stoning by Christ in John 7:53-8:11.⁴²⁶ Historically, Mary Magdalene has popularly been taken to be a woman of the demimondaine. In point of fact, there is no scriptural evidence that Mary Magdalene was either a prostitute or a sinner, though she does figure as a demoniac exorcised by Jesus.⁴²⁷ Her association with sin stems from her wrongful conflation with Mary of Bethany (perpetuated in the Catholic tradition), who at least according to Luke and John, is the sinful woman who anoints Jesus. Wagner also has Mary Magdalene in this anointing role, and she is moreover with Jesus by the Sea of Galilee in Act II,

⁴²⁶ This passage, known as the *Pericope Adulterae*, is among the more heavily disputed sections of the Gospels in terms of its textual authenticity. It does not occur in any of the Synoptic Gospels and, more importantly, is not present in any of the otherwise fairly complete early manuscripts, leading some to assert that it was added by a later hand.

⁴²⁷ Luke 8:2 and Mark 16:9.

at the Temple with Jesus in Act III, at the Last Supper in Act IV (which Wagner also somewhat precipitously combines with the anointing episode), and at Jesus's trial in Act V. These appearances by Mary Magdalene are all inventions by Wagner, as in the Bible accounts, she is not explicitly mentioned until the crucifixion and resurrection, other than her aforementioned exorcism. Wagner clearly felt a need to have a stronger female "redemptive" character, particularly as an innocent foil for the conniving Judas, and chose Mary Magdalene for this role. Mary Magdalene also functions as a sort of positive female example to demonstrate the wrongheadedness of gender relations that treat women as property, particularly in the marital context.

As Wagner's scriptural citations will make clear, he heavily emphasizes several main themes throughout *Jesus of Nazareth*, including the primacy of love, the balefulness of materialism, and the oppressiveness of the law, all of which need to be radically and revolutionarily redressed. As we have seen, these same points of emphasis are likewise apparent in the plot of *Jesus von Nazareth* itself.

There are also characterological considerations that Wagner chooses to stress in the development of his dramatis personæ. There is, for example, a strong contrast between Jesus and both Judas and Barabbas, but moreso between Jesus and the latter. While both Judas and Barabbas are politically anti-Roman Zealots (קדמאן / ζηλωταί) who are disabused of their aspirational faith in Jesus's hoped-for militarism by his noncompliant, idealized embodiment of righteousness in pacifistic nonresistance, Judas has traditionally been seen as a more direct antagonist to Jesus in orthodox Christianity, and has therefore been vilified as such. From Wagner's more humanistic perspective, the fact that both Jesus and Barabbas are condemned to death and are therefore in a fight for their lives makes their contrast more compelling. Focusing

on this scene also allows Wagner to stress the role of the corrupt pharisaical Jewish leaders in perverting the popular will. There is also the curiosity, not mentioned by Wagner, that Barabbas and Jesus in fact likely share a name, as Barabbas is “λεγόμενον Ἰησοῦν Βαραββᾶν” – “called Jesus Barabbas” – in some textual variants of Matthew 27:16.⁴²⁸ This is contrasted with “Ἰησοῦν τὸν λεγόμενον χριστόν” – “Jesus who is called Christ” – in the next verse. The name “Barabbas” (“בר אבא” / “Βαραββᾶς”) moreover literally means “son of the father,” echoing Jesus’s reference to God as “Abba” (“אבא” / “Αββᾶ”), or “father,” in Mark 14:36, which episode Wagner again does not specifically mention. Jesus and Barabbas, then, nearly take on the aspect of opposed sons.

The greatest reason for Wagner’s de-escalation of Judas’s conflict with Jesus is his compensatorily enhanced role as a foil to Mary Magdalene. The two are frequently opposed, most specifically in their actions concerning Jesus directly. They can on some level be thought of as representing male and female personality-halves, i.e., activity versus passivity, though Wagner does not make this explicit. Mary Magdalene observes Judas’s treacherous overtures to the Pharisees and attempts to warn Jesus. Judas criticizes Mary Magdalene for anointing Jesus, and she is later accosted by Judas and the Pharisees’ henchman. In all of these instances she is essentially passive and dependent on Jesus’s mercy, while Judas’s own efforts ultimately come to naught. This may be another instance of Wagner’s independent development of a Schopenhaurian-type outlook prior to his actual encounter of that philosopher’s work.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁸ Specifically, this reading is preferred in the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th edition (NA27) and in the United Bible Societies *Greek New Testament*, 4th edition (UBS4). The sources for the Ἰησοῦν Βαραββᾶν reading include the *Codex Koridethi* and the Family 1 manuscripts, among others. The second and third century AD theologian Origen was perhaps the first scholar to dispute this reading, favoring merely “τὸν Βαραββᾶν.”

⁴²⁹ Arthur Schopenhauer, who heavily influenced Wagner’s later thinking, posited that, based on his study of Kant, reality consists of a unitary underlying Will (*Wille*), our seemingly differentiated perception whereof is merely

Wagner's Exegetical Framework

Does Wagner favor a particular Gospel or scriptural outlook in *Jesus von Nazareth*? The most compelling case can be made for the Gospel of John. John is the most abstract and least narratively expository of the Gospels, and it is thought to have been written more for the edification of already-believing Christians than for evangelic intent.⁴³⁰ As can be seen in Wagner's pseudo-Feuerbachian rambling in part two of *Jesus von Nazareth*, the composer was certainly not wanting in his penchant for abstraction, or, dare we say, mysticism bordering on obfuscation. Additionally, *Jesus von Nazareth* was obviously intended for an already-Christian audience, at least in a cultural sense.

We can also look at Wagner's later works to reverse-assemble the development of his probable Johannine outlook. Arguing in favor of a Johannine bias on Wagner's part is a telling plot detail from his 1868 *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*: the first two acts of the opera are set on "Johannisnacht," which is also Midsummer's Eve, and the final, climactic act centers around the celebration of Johannistag itself. St. John's Eve and feast notably celebrate the birth of the evangelist rather than the more typical festal commemoration of death or martyrdom. Wagner's dramatic choice in *Meistersinger* of the solstice, a day of light, i.e. the Johannine φῶς, and of a feast emphasizing birth rather than death, both appear to have been intentional rather than incidental details, particularly in a work whose mood is by far the most upbeat of Wagner's

a deceptive Representation (*Vorstellung*); given this fundamental unity of all things, any *prima facie* productive action that we attempt to undertake via positivistic empiricism is in fact merely an aspect of all-encompassing illusion (*Wahn*). See further discussion below. Additionally, see further in Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969).

⁴³⁰ In the traditional schema, Matthew was written for the Jews, Mark for the Romans, Luke for the Greeks (or Gentiles), and John for the believing Christian church. See further, e.g., Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief: An Analytic Study of the Text* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948).

mature dramas. It should not then surprise us that Wagner's own outlook may overlap with that of the author of the Johannine literature.⁴³¹

Counterbalancing this suggestive evidence from *Meistersinger* is the case of Wagner's 1865 *Tristan and Isolde*. While the opera makes strong, almost tendentiously repetitive use of light/dark symbolism, the roles of the metaphor are reversed. Instead of being a force for good, light and day represent societal constraint, oppression of the individual, and, most importantly, the marked absence of love. Darkness and night represent freedom, joy, and the flowering of love. Such a configuration certainly inverts the standard Johannine light/dark dichotomy on its head.

Finally, as we will see, Wagner later came under the influence August Friedrich Gfrörer, a biblical scholar who among other conclusions valorized the Gospel of John and decided that it alone among the Gospels was fully supported by historical analysis. Wagner to a large extent found himself more simply in accord with Gfrörer than under his sway, so his Johannine outlook in this regard prefigured his encounter with Gfrörer rather than resulted from it.

There remains, however, the nagging and significant detail that Wagner does not actually cite John as frequently in *Jesus von Nazareth*, comparatively speaking, as he does other books. Though he was clearly well acquainted with the preponderance of the New Testament, Wagner specifically focuses on the Synoptic Gospels in part three of *Jesus von Nazareth*, and moreso on Matthew and Luke than on Mark. Wagner does, however, take care to source several key episodes from the Johannine account, particularly the events up to Jesus's final days in chapters

⁴³¹ The Gospel, Epistles, and Apocalypse of John are traditionally attributed to their eponymous Apostle, but this conclusion has been questioned and to some extent refuted in the higher criticism.

twelve through seventeen, notably including the Last Supper.⁴³² John's depiction of this event includes several unique elements not present in the other Gospels. Jesus takes on an even more humble and sacrificial character, as only in this version is he depicted as washing the feet of the Apostles.⁴³³ John also describes the Last Supper as occurring before Passover, rather than on Passover itself as in the Synoptic Gospels.⁴³⁴ Thus, for John, Jesus's crucifixion occurs on the very day of Passover, and the Lamb of God is thus sacrificed at the same moment as lambs are being slaughtered for Passover meals. John's account is also the source of the New Commandment, to love one another,⁴³⁵ and of Jesus's extensive farewell discourse to the Apostles.⁴³⁶ All these distinctive elements reflect Wagner's own preoccupations to some degree. Wagner's Jesus is selfless and materially bereft, and thus sacrificial and humble. This makes him more of a figure of human sympathy. Much of Wagner's drama is also concerned with the relationship between Jesus and his disciples, particularly on the level of master/student, which John's farewell discourse describes in metaphorical detail. Finally, Wagner is above all concerned with the universality of love, which the new commandment makes explicitly manifest. Wagner's fixation on Johannine principles almost seems to indicate a desire on his part to create a "Church of John," based on love and freedom, as a corrective to the perceived historical ills of the Catholic "Church of Peter," based on a hierarchical magisterium.

⁴³² Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 338.

⁴³³ John 13:4-17.

⁴³⁴ John 13:1.

⁴³⁵ John 13:34-35, John 15:12, and John 15:17.

⁴³⁶ John 14-17.

Wagner does not hesitate to include selections from the breadth of the Johannine literature, including John's Epistles and Apocalypse in addition to his Gospel. Of course, there is also the possibility that Wagner had so subsumed John's outlook that it is infused throughout the work, rendering specific citation unnecessary. The main explanation, however, is that John's lack of narrative focus and drive lends itself rather less well to point by point summarization and encapsulation than do the Synoptic Gospels. The narrative drive of the Synoptic Gospels is frankly a necessity in developing a forward-moving dramatic plotline, with the inciting incidents thereby required. Another quibble is that Wagner does not share John's penchant for reference to "the word" (ὁ λόγος), though Wagner's focus on love as a concept to some extent recreates this fixedness of metaphor in an alternate though comparable mode of spirituality.⁴³⁷

⁴³⁷ Cf. the opening chapter of Goethe's *Faust*, in which the eponymous protagonist puzzles over the first verse of John's Gospel, "Am Anfang war das Wort (In the beginning was the word)," which he finds unsatisfactory; in place of "Wort" he substitutes "Sinn (mind/meaning)" and "Kraft (power)" before settling on "Tat (action)." (lines 1224-1237.) This recalls the emphasis of Wagner's Jesus on concrete action instead of mere contemplation. Faust is famously saved by angels proclaiming "Wer immer strebend sich bemüht / Den können wir erlösen (Whoever exerts himself in constant striving / Him we can save)." Somewhat less related to *Jesus von Nazareth*, but nevertheless of interest, is *Faust's* concluding *Chorus Mysticus*, which relates the propulsive power of "Das Ewig-Weibliche (the eternal feminine)," much like the theme of redemption through (generally female) love which permeates Wagner's oeuvre. (See Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust Parts I & II*, trans. A. S. Kline, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/German/Fausthome.htm>.) Remembering Wagner's anarchist influences, there is also the nineteenth-century radical notion of the "propaganda of the deed" – "deed" is the literal cognate of "Tat." The idealist philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte equated Goethe's use of *Tat* with his own motivating concept of the *Tathandlung*, the self-evident "fact/act." (See Eiichi Shimomissé, "History of the 19th Century European Philosophy - Lecture 2 - Johann Gottlieb Fichte [1762-1814]," accessed November 27, 2013, http://www.csudh.edu/phenom_studies/europ19/lect_2.html, and Curtis Bowman, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "Johann Gottlieb Fichte [1762-1814]," accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/fichtejg/>.)

Chapter 5: Scriptural Citations and Theoretical Underpinning

“Seid niemand nichts schuldig, als daß ihr euch untereinander liebt; denn wer den andern liebt, der hat das Gesetz erfüllt.”⁴³⁸

It is noteworthy that Wagner uses scriptural citations from the entirety of the New Testament, and not merely from the Gospels alone, as one might expect if he were confining himself merely to the life of Jesus. One would assume that from a historical and narrative perspective, Wagner would need only the Gospels, given his subject matter. It can be said that the epistolary scriptures generated by the early Christian church, detailing events after Jesus’ earthly ministry, serve to better elucidate the purpose of Jesus’ purpose, and Wagner himself indeed makes no distinction between scripture accounting the actual life of Jesus and that which came after. It appears that Wagner saw the theological and rhetorical value of the non-Gospel New Testament as functioning to clarify Jesus’s message, or rather, Wagner’s own interpretation of it.

However, Wagner does not expand this same elucidative scope in chronological reverse, since, as noted, he makes no use of the Old Testament whatsoever. This is out of keeping with the traditional Christian identification of Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament’s messianic prophecies. The closest that Wagner comes to this is in his oblique discussion of love as the fulfillment of the law and the prophets, though he never approaches the Old Testament itself directly. Since Wagner has no difficulty incorporating the extra-Gospel New Testament

⁴³⁸ Luther’s translation of Romans 13:8. “Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.” (English Standard Version) Cf. “Μηδενι μηδεν οφειλετε ει μη το αλληλους αγαπᾶν· ο γαρ αγαπων τον ετερον νομον πεπληρωκεν.” Though Wagner does not cite this verse specifically, it succinctly sums up his outlook in *Jesus von Nazareth*.

canon where it serves his purposes, his reluctance to do the same with the Old Testament appears likely to be due to his burgeoning anti-Semitism. Wagner's bifurcation of the Bible in this manner and his attempt to deny the interrelatedness of its two halves will, as we will see, become much more apparent in his later writings.

Wagner relied on the 1545 revision of Luther's German New Testament for his scriptural citations.⁴³⁹ Ashton Ellis does not wholly re-translate the German for these passages but uses "the Authorised and the Revised versions," i.e., the King James Bible, subject to his own Germanicizing modifications.⁴⁴⁰ Additionally, as is to be expected, Wagner's choices of scripture are highly selective, and even lacunose, as he foreseeably and understandably includes verses which buttress his own perspective while omitting those which do not. In terms of method, Wagner tends to proceed on a chapter-by-chapter basis in which he highlights verses which best encapsulate his own ideas in a summary manner.

Wagner's overall citation of scripture is at its greatest in his planning for the earlier Acts of *Jesus von Nazareth*, and tapers off as Act V is approached. Act V itself only includes five scriptural selections.⁴⁴¹ This can possibly be attributed to a tapering off of effort and enthusiasm on Wagner's part, but more likely to the general effect of constructing his own narrative, which must have necessarily diverged from its Biblical source material and into Wagner's own diegetic world.

⁴³⁹ See note 32 above for a discussion of this thesis's sources for biblical citations.

⁴⁴⁰ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 323.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 340.

Wagner's Relative Understanding of Greek

It should be noted that Wagner considered himself a cultural (and, incidentally, political)⁴⁴² philhellene, and indeed arrived at the conclusion, almost inevitable considering his egotism, that his own dramatic efforts made him the natural heir to the tradition of the classical Greek tragedians,⁴⁴³ most notably Aeschylus, whose artistic synthesis he identified most closely with his own concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* – the “complete,” integrative, and multi-modal work of art that he saw as embodied in his own music dramas.⁴⁴⁴ One gets a sense of the extent to which his fascination with the ancients clouded his religious sensibilities when one sees Wagner waxing rhapsodic on the artistic power of Greek tragedy in *Die Kunst und die Revolution*, where the individual experiencing such art is identified as “at once both God and Priest, glorious godlike man, one with the Universal, the Universal summed up in him.” Reinforcing this Feuerbachian anthropo-apotheosis, Wagner goes on to exclaim “that it were better to be for half a day a Greek in presence of this tragic Art-work, than to all eternity an—un-Greek God!”⁴⁴⁵

For our purposes, however, it is important to realize that Wagner did have a working knowledge of the Greek language itself. Greek was part of the required curriculum at the

⁴⁴² Wagner reports that at the even at the age of six, “newspaper accounts and monthly reports of the events of the Greek War of Independence stirred my imagination deeply.” Wagner, *My Life* (1911), 4.

⁴⁴³ Wagner even compared the four-part structure of his *Der Ring des Nibelungen* cycle to the tetralogy of three tragedies and a satyr play traditionally presented by playwrights at the Athenian City Dionysia (Διονύσια τὰ ἐν Ἄσσει), and used this rationale in his unsuccessful attempt to prevent piecemeal performances of the *Ring*'s component operas by his patron Ludwig II of Bavaria. (See Dieter Borchmeyer, *Drama and the World of Richard Wagner* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003], 267.)

⁴⁴⁴ Wagner's self-regard in this matter no doubt influenced Nietzsche's early and somewhat fawning estimation of him in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, which envisions the possibility of a rebirth of tragedy through the re-balancing of Apollonian and Dionysian tendencies in and through Wagner's operas, even alleging that tragedy itself is borne from music.

⁴⁴⁵ Wagner, *Art and Revolution*, 34-35.

Kreuzschule in Dresden, which Wagner attended from age nine to fourteen. He reports during this time, in addition to his overwhelming attraction to classical antiquity in general and Greek mythology and history specifically, he “felt drawn to the Greek language itself with a power that made me almost ungovernable in my shirking of Latin,” and goes on to describe his favorite teacher’s advisement of a career in philology.⁴⁴⁶ However, Wagner elsewhere avers that the content of the myths was the source of his interest, and “the grammar of the language seemed to me merely a tiresome obstacle, and by no means in itself an interesting branch of knowledge.”⁴⁴⁷ He further describes his linguistic studies as “never very thorough” and “not far advanced” to engage in detailed studies of original Greek texts, though, yet again, he does later describe translating Homer at length.⁴⁴⁸ Nevertheless, by adulthood, Wagner recounts his “lost knowledge” of the Greek language.⁴⁴⁹ We therefore have no reason to suspect that Wagner had any interest in the biblical (as opposed to classical) Greek language at the time of his composition of *Jesus von Nazareth*, and therefore that he made no study of the Greek New Testament when compiling scriptural citations. However, Wagner’s general training in the language meant that he could have, if he had so desired, conferred with the Greek text in cases of ambiguity, particularly in the instances in which Luther’s translation is inadequate. He apparently chose not to do so. Nevertheless, given his background with Greek, the eisegetical errors which Wagner makes below are somewhat less excusable given his capability to have analyzed the original biblical text. This is a particularly glaring deficiency in light of the

⁴⁴⁶ Qtd. in Glasenapp, vol. 1, 83-84.

⁴⁴⁷ Wagner, *My Life* (1911), 15.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 15-16 and 25.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 316.

tremendous amount of textual analysis being done by Wagner's contemporaries. In an age when philology could lay claim to the title of "queen of the sciences," Wagner's own discarding thereof speaks to his greater interest in self-serving ideologizing than in hermeneutic accuracy.

Love

Wagner focuses heavily on passages emphasizing the importance of love. Love being a less controversial concept and less open to interpretation, Wagner makes fewer questionable citations concerning it than he does on topics such as the law and materialism. In contrast to his valorization of love, Wagner also includes many passages that denigrate blind adherence to the law, opposing love and the law to one another. The law and love are not entirely at odds, however. In true dialectic fashion, the completion of the law – its proper fulfillment – both results in and springs from love. "Every commandment is contained in this: Thou shalt love (ἀγαπήσεις / sollst ... lieben) thy neighbor as thyself. Love (ἀγάπη / Liebe) doeth no ill to his neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfilment (πλήρωμα / Erfüllung) of the law."⁴⁵⁰ Here, and as seen below, Wagner is in accord with the fundamentals of the "Golden Rule," at least as he interprets it.⁴⁵¹

The study of the various Greek words connoting "love" is a frequently-encountered phenomenon in analyses of the New Testament. ἀγάπη is generally taken to connote, at least in the biblical context, the most selfless or divine form thereof. German has a few synonyms of its

⁴⁵⁰ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 326-327; Romans 13:9-10.

⁴⁵¹ Wagner does not embrace the same secularizing, rationalizing methodology as is to be found in, for example, Kant's categorical imperative.

own, such as *Minne*, but Luther remains content with *Liebe*-derived forms.⁴⁵² Therefore, unless otherwise stated, references to love in Wagner's scriptural citations make use of these terms, or if not, the change in diction is semantically unremarkable. The implications of “πλήρωμα” and “Erfüllung” are further discussed below.

Wagner speaks to the requisite selflessness of love, that even sinners love those who love them. “If ye love them which love you, what thank have ye?”⁴⁵³ There is also of course the induction to “love your enemies.”⁴⁵⁴ (Both verses in fact refer to collective action, as they use a second person plural which English does not preserve). Love is therefore only distinguished when it is sacrificial, the theme of sacrifice, or course, being a key Wagnerian topos. Similarly, and combining the necessity of neighborly love with the fulfillment of the law: “Thou shalt love God thy Lord with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind. This is the chief and greatest commandment. The other is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. In these two commandments dwell the whole Law and the Prophets.”⁴⁵⁵ Notably, this is not the law *of* the prophets, but two separate entities, though Wagner would seek to conflate them to some extent in order to thereby distinguish his antinomian Jesus. We see here also that human love is essentially derived from God's love for man. Having “the love of God” in ourselves is similarly a prerequisite for being able to love to other men.⁴⁵⁶ (The pronoun in question is again plural.) Further in this vein: “One God and Father of all, who is above you all and through you all and in

⁴⁵² Wagner's *Tannhäuser* similarly takes medieval the *Minnesänger* as its subject but makes no mention of *Minne* itself.

⁴⁵³ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 326; Luke 6:32.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 330; Luke 6:27.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 334; Matthew 22:37-40.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 331; John 5:42.

you all.”⁴⁵⁷ The presence of God in humanity is the distributive force for God’s love through that same humanity. God is moreover decidedly immanently present in this passage. And love is the means through which freedom from fear and doubt can be obtained, or at least striven toward: “There is no fear in love, but perfect (τελεία / völlige) love casteth out fear. For fear hath torment. He that feareth, is not perfect (οὐ τετελείωται / ist nicht völlig) in his love.”⁴⁵⁸ The Greek is in fact a passive construction, better rendered as “made complete” by a source external to the subject, presumably God. This is thus perhaps less individual accountability in this verse, and thus less room to condemn those who love incompletely, than Wagner would like.

However, love of one’s fellow man should not – and indeed cannot – eclipse one’s love of God, viz., “He that loveth (φιλῶν / liebt) father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me,” with the same being said of sons and daughters.⁴⁵⁹ From a theological perspective, it could be argued that the power of God’s love for man certainly represents love in its strongest form, and that man’s reciprocal love for God must therefore by definition brook no equal. Indeed, “φιλῶν” here is the participial love of affective emotion, rather than the stronger ἀγαπῶν of venerable admiration. More practicably speaking, this passage seems to suggest the necessity of continued faith on the part of the believer even if his own family members themselves remain outside the fold. Such a circumstance of divided religious persuasions would make itself apparent in Wagner’s own household, with his future Catholic wife Cosima’s conversion to his own pseudo-Protestantism ultimately representing a somewhat superficial gesture.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 327; Ephesians 4:6.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., 328; 1 John 4:18.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., 329-330; Matthew 10:37.

Love is moreover not an abstract concept, but requires active expression, i.e., works. Wagner is indeed emphatic on the necessity of the deed over and against contemplation: “*Which of you by taking thought (μεριμνῶν / sorget) can add one cubit unto his stature?*”⁴⁶⁰ (This verse also figures into the context of Wagner’s anti-materialism below.) We see further that “ye, dear brethren, have been called to freedom. Yet see that through freedom ye do not give way to the flesh, but by love serve one another.”⁴⁶¹ Not only does love require service of one’s fellow man, but serves as a form of restraint to ensure that such activity is properly directed; again it is in this manner that the law is fulfilled.

Love can, however, be false. There is the risk of “seduction to unrighteousness,” with “lying powers” and “strong delusions” being contrasted with “the love of truth.”⁴⁶² Love therefore involves discernment, making love and reason intertwined; again we see that Wagner emphasizes not just action but the requisite proper direction of one’s energies. This does, of course, provide convenient rhetorical cover to for Wagner to propound his own version of what this appropriate action is.

Wagner’s Johanne citations echo many of the same concepts that we have seen above. “But he that loveth not his brother, he is not of God”⁴⁶³ and “He that loveth not his brother,

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid, 329; Matthew 6:27 and Luke 12:25. The sentence is italicized in Ashton Ellis’s translation. The original German version does not make use of italicization, but this phrase (79) and other emphasized passages are printed in a slightly larger font with additional spacing between letters to indicate emphasis. Additionally, “taking thought” is a poor rendering of the Greek, which uses the participle “μεριμνῶν,” accurately (in semantic if not morphological terms) translated by Luther with the verb “sorgen,” to convey a sense of worry or anxiety. Cf. 1 John 4:18 above regarding the incompatibility of love and fear, with the implication that love must *be* free from anxiety, or that love *makes* one free from anxiety

⁴⁶¹ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 333; Galatians 5:13.

⁴⁶² “τὴν ἀγάπην τῆς ἀληθείας.” Ibid., 339; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 327; 1 John 4:20.

abideth in death.”⁴⁶⁴ And also: “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth. – But whoso hath this world’s goods and seeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his heart to him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?”⁴⁶⁵ The emphasis on hypocrisy is apparent, and will be further analyzed as it pertains to materialism.

Wagner even includes the verses 1 Corinthians 13, describing the futility of a life without love.⁴⁶⁶ However, speaking to Wagner’s antinomianism, we do find the condemnation of the loveless marriage; i.e., marriage-as-property.

So ought husbands also to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife, he loveth himself. For no man has ever hated his own flesh, but he nourisheth it and tendeth it, even as the Lord also the communion (ἐκκλησίαν / Gemeinde). For we are members of his body, of his flesh, of his bones.⁴⁶⁷

The common substance of God and man and likewise of man with his fellow man necessitates a unity of spirit within love generally and within marriage specifically. Love between a husband and wife is like the Eucharistic union achieved between God and believer. The idea of a unity of spirit certainly gives one pause to contemplate a possible unwitting foreshadowing by Wagner of the undifferentiated Schopenhaurian *Wille* which he would latterly so strongly embrace. It should be noted, however, that Wagner does omit the immediately preceding verses propounding the necessity of the submission of the wife to the husband, as this certainly would undermine his antinomian purpose. Wagner’s scriptural errors are, as such, frequently sins of omission as much as they are of misinterpretation.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.; 1 John 3:14.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 327-328; 1 John 3:18 and 3:17.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 327; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. These are among the verses which have become a nigh-omnipresent component of wedding vows, in a similar fashion to Wagner’s own “Treulich geführt” from *Lohengrin*.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.; Ephesians 5:28-30. See discussion of *Gemeinde* above.

Finally, as we have seen in Graap’s analysis, Wagner goes so far as to modify the verse famously valorized by Luther, that man is alone justified (“δικαιοῦσθαι” / “gerecht werde”) by faith (“πίστει” / “Glauben”) to a justification by “love” (“Liebe”). Wagner does at least insert his “Liebe” parenthetically. Similarly, Wagner does preserve the implied antinomian intent of the original that such justification occurs “without the work of the law (χωρὶς ἔργων νόμου / ohne des Gesetzes Werk).”⁴⁶⁸ Nevertheless, it is difficult to believe that this episode is a mere dismissal on Wagner’s part of faith in favor in love. Instead, it is likely that he saw a deep connection between the two. Does not love require a strong faith, in that it assumes an uncertain reciprocity by the object of one’s love? Faith similarly requires an abstract love – an embrace of existence itself, or *amor fati*, as Nietzsche would have it.

The Law

Regarding the law, Wagner cites the example of healing on the Sabbath. “The Son of man is lord even of the sabbath: [sic] – ‘Is it lawful also to heal on the sabbath?’ And he said unto them: ‘Who is there among you that hath a sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, he will not lay hold on it and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do good on the sabbath.’”⁴⁶⁹ He latter enjoins that “the sabbath was made for man and not man for the sabbath.”⁴⁷⁰ It should be noted here that the lowercase “sabbath” found in Ashton Ellis’s translation appears to be a hyper-corrective attempt to emulate Wagner’s

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 336 and Wagner, *Jesus von Nazareth* (1887), 92; Romans 3:28. In terms of “work” versus “works,” Wagner employs the singular “Werk,” while Luther’s translation uses the plural “Werke.” The latter is more faithful to the original Greek ἔργων, which is plural.

⁴⁶⁹ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 323-324; Matthew 12:8-11.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 325; Mark 2:27.

expressed de-capitalization mania, since the German “Sabbath”⁴⁷¹ is in fact capitalized in the original version of *Jesus von Nazareth*.⁴⁷² Wagner seems to present an argument for logicity, practicality, and utility, of which the law is the enemy, particularly, as we shall see, when it is implemented in terms of its letter rather than its spirit. The law serves to protect the privileged rather than to empower humanity to better itself through freedom. Wagner’s intention in asserting Jesus’s lordship over the Sabbath appears to be that to the extent that the Sabbath does deserve reverence, it does so due to its consecration by Jesus.

Wagner echoes one of the traditional Christian justifications for the abandonment of rigorous Jewish dietary restrictions: “Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.”⁴⁷³ Here there is an apparent distinct emphasis on obedience to the spirit of the law rather than its letter, and perhaps also an ethical perspective tilted toward a Kantian deontology which, like the Golden Rule, prizes individual intention over accomplished results. Indeed, Wagner quotes Romans 7:6, concerning deliverance from the law (here clearly expressed as νόμου / Gesetz) and the necessity of serving “the new order of the spirit (καινότητι πνεύματος / neuen Wesen des Geistes)” rather than “the old order of the letter (παλαιότητι γράμματος / alten Wesen des Buchstabens).”⁴⁷⁴ It is necessary to point out that both the Greek and Luther’s German are abstract in their connotation of “newness” and “oldness,” with Wesen conveying a sense of existence, nature, or being, and certainly not an

⁴⁷¹ Generally rendered “Sabbat” in modern German orthography. Wagner retained the final “h.”

⁴⁷² Wagner, *Jesus von Nazareth* (1887), 70 and 72.

⁴⁷³ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 324; Matthew 15:11.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 332.

“order,” particularly not in a political sense. Any revolution in this regard must therefore likewise be one of the spirit rather than of the barricade.

Among the final passages that Wagner cites for the conclusion of Act V is Romans 8:2, which again distinguishes between, on the one hand, the law of the spirit (and of life), and on the other, the law of sin and death, from which latter Jesus has set one free (ἠλευθέρωσέν / hat frei gemacht).⁴⁷⁵ The Greek manuscripts differ on whether the person being set free is “you” (σε) or “me” (με), the latter referring to the speaker, Paul.⁴⁷⁶ Luther employs “mich.” Wagner, however, changes this to “uns,” without any textual justification for so doing.⁴⁷⁷ While this does not substantially alter the meaning of the verse, since it is logical to assume that liberation from the law of sin would apply generally, Wagner’s attempted emendation here seems to signify a symbolic broadening of emphasis, and a transfer of the importance of the verse out of its immediate context and into the realm of applicability for all believers. Based on the previous discussion of the spirit and the letter, Wagner could clearly come to identify the former with life based on this verse, and could understandably extend the analogue to conflate the letter with sin and death. It also is important to note that this passage obviously by no means countenances an elimination of the law, but instead a new spiritual form thereof, mediated by Jesus. Indeed, in the context of sin, Wagner ignores passages like 1 John 3:4: “Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness (ἀνομία / Unrecht.)”⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 340.

⁴⁷⁶ The generally less critically-accepted editions, such as the *Textus Receptus* and the Byzantine Majority Text, employ με, while the generally more critically-accepted additions, such as Westcott and Hort, Nestle, and Tischendorf, use σε.

⁴⁷⁷ Wagner, *Jesus von Nazareth* (1887), 100.

⁴⁷⁸ English Standard Version.

Returning to the notion of dietary restrictions, Wagner later cites more familiar Petrine vision from Acts, in which “a voice” (“φωνή”) silences Peter’s objections to unclean food with the command that “what God hath cleansed, thou call not common.”⁴⁷⁹ One should also keep in mind in this connection the bumbling approach Wagner took toward his own dietary principles, which, as seen elsewhere, in reality fell far short, and perhaps hypocritically so, from his proclaimed ideal of teetotaling vegetarianism.⁴⁸⁰ Nevertheless, Wagner’s emphasis on the New Testament’s inveighing against the principles of Jewish kashrut can be taken as both a manifestation of his anti-Semitic sensibilities and as a suspicion of tradition generally, as he also repeats the criticism that sin cannot be expiated by “by the blood of bulls and goats.”⁴⁸¹

Wagner echoes the Gospels’ constant refrain of legalistic pharisaical disapprobation of Jesus, as if to strongly frame Christ as in opposition to injustice generally. Act I of the drama, in particular, features extensive disputations between Jesus and the Pharisees and appears to have been designed by Wagner as a diatribe against the law. Wagner also cites John 11:47 and the following verses to buttress his Act III depiction of the priestly and Pharisaical conspiracy against Jesus.⁴⁸² Jesus’s rebuke to the Pharisees in these situations generally consists, in part, of a counter-accusation of hypocrisy, based on the notion that the law has become corrupted and misapplied. In response to the allegation that his “disciples transgress the traditions of the elders” due to uncleanness while eating, Jesus replies that one in fact can, through adherence to

⁴⁷⁹ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 326; Acts 10: 14-15.

⁴⁸⁰ Vegetarianism itself has had been the subject of a contentious and disputed debate from the earliest days of the development of Christian dietary practice.

⁴⁸¹ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 337; Hebrews 10:4. Wagner’s usage of the singular “Sünde (sin)” again differs from the source materials, as Luther’s plural “Sünden” more accurately reproduces the Greek plural “ἁμαρτίας.” (Wagner, *Jesus von Nazareth* [1887], 93.)

⁴⁸² Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 335.

tradition, instead “transgress the commandment of God,” and that, moreover, that “ye have made void the law of God because of your tradition.”⁴⁸³ It should be noted that here Luther uses the more textually accurate “Gebot,” or command(ment) here, so in Wagner’s mind there would have been no reference to the voiding of “the law” through tradition, but rather instead the transgressing God’s commandment, thus reinforcing the distinction between the letter and the spirit of the law, with “Gottes Gebot” more strongly corresponding to the latter, given its emphasis on the expressed intention of the Almighty rather than on any written decree.⁴⁸⁴ There is an attempt to place ownership of the law in the hands of the Pharisees when Jesus describes it as “your law,” thus strengthening the sense of hypocrisy when it is perverted.⁴⁸⁵

Wagner reinforces his position in regard to legalistic hypocrisy: “On Moses’ seat sit the scribes and pharisees [sic]; they speak the law, but do it not. They bind heavy burdens grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders, but themselves will not move with a finger.”⁴⁸⁶ Again, though, both the Greek and Luther describe “works (ἔργα / Werken)” here, not the “law.” For Wagner, then, hypocrisy in word and deed would thus in fact be independent of the context of legality and extend beyond it, though misuse of the law provides the most striking example.

⁴⁸³ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 324; Matthew 15:1-6.

⁴⁸⁴ This is a somewhat problematic passage in that the Greek manuscripts differ amongst themselves in the word which is here (Matthew 15:6) translated as “law,” with some using “ἐντολήν” and others “λόγον.” The translation by Luther which Wagner used was made from the Greek of Erasmus’s *Textus Receptus*, a document whose accuracy has frequently been deprecated by modern scholarship. In this passage the *Textus Receptus* reads “ἐντολήν.” In any event, the manuscripts are in agreement on the use of ἐντολήν in the preceding Matthew 15:3. This is best translated as “command(ment),” which Luther, as mentioned, accurately renders as “Gebot.” Joseph Thayer comments that ἐντολήν in both Matthew 15:3 and 6 is “used of the commandments of the Mosaic law: ἡ ἐντολή τοῦ θεοῦ, what God prescribes in the law of Moses.” (Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* [Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009], s.v. “1785, ἐντολή,” 218.) While it is debatable whether a commandment from God de facto constitutes a law, in no case should either ἐντολήν or λόγον be translated as “law.”

⁴⁸⁵ The Greek word for “your” (in the plural sense) here reflects this emphasis, as it employs the stronger ὑμετέρω rather than the more standard ὑμῶν. Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 335; John 8:17.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 334; Matthew 23:2-4.

Indeed, “the heathen, which have not the law, yet do by nature the work of the law; these same, having not the law, are a law unto themselves, in that they shew [sic] that the work of the law is written in their hearts.”⁴⁸⁷ Again, Wagner is stressing that actions speak louder than words. Wagner also stresses the responsibility that comes with knowledge, and particularly with knowledge of the law, quoting Jesus’s attack on the lawyers (“τοῖς νομικοῖς,” nevertheless rendered as “Schriftgelehrten” by Luther and “scribes” by Ashton Ellis), who “build the sepulchers of the prophets, but your fathers killed them ... Woe unto you scribes,⁴⁸⁸ for ye have the key of knowledge (γνώσεως); ye enter not therein, and ward them off that fain would enter.”⁴⁸⁹ The knowledge referred to in this instance is γνῶσις (in the nominative), and it is experiential, practical, and applied in nature; in short, it is “wisdom.” Luther’s “Erkenntnis” here represents a good approximation of meaning, implying an acquired realization.⁴⁹⁰ Thus Wagner’s emphasis on practicality and action is again reinforced. The overall intent of Wagner’s elucidation of Jesus’s message in this connection is that of a redemption of the prophets, and therefore of tradition, from the vicissitudes of hypocrisy. Wagner also emphatically cites several passages from 1 John, asserting that Jesus does not bring a “*new commandment* (ἐντολήν)” but rather one “*from the beginning*,” and that he who is born of God commits no sin, with love of one’s brother the requisite sign of such parentage.⁴⁹¹ Jesus is again presented as an authenticator

⁴⁸⁷ The heathen referred to here are in fact the Gentiles (ἔθνη), though Luther also translates this as “Heiden.” Ibid., 331; Romans 2:14-15.

⁴⁸⁸ Again, actually τοῖς νομικοῖς.

⁴⁸⁹ The Greek in fact describes those already in the process of entering (τοὺς εἰσερχομένους). Ibid., 334; Luke 11:47 and 52; cf. Matthew 23.

⁴⁹⁰ K. B. Beaton, *A Practical Dictionary of German Usage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), s.v. “knowledge,” 386-387.

⁴⁹¹ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 327; 1 John 1-4.

of what is just in the principles of the commandments, much as Wagner would come to see himself.

There are also the familiar Pharisaical denunciations of Jesus's dining with publicans (tax collectors) and sinners, and of his disciples' infrequent fasting.⁴⁹² In addition to Jesus's explanations to these claims in light of the nature of his ministry, Wagner is clever enough to additionally include the episode in which Zacchaeus (to whom he refers indeterminately as "Der Zöllner," potentially creating confusion with "Der Zöllner Levi" from Act I) makes recompense of his ill-gotten gains to the poor, thus providing an episode of actual redemption accomplished on Jesus's behalf and a counterpoint to those who would question his associations.⁴⁹³ There is even the allegation that instead of preserving one from sin, the law itself is rather causative thereof: "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law," from which one is redeemed through Christ.⁴⁹⁴ However, Wagner, previous to this, cites the assertion from the same chapter that in "*the end* (τὸ τέλος / das Ende) ... *he shall abolish all rule and all and all supremacy and power.*"⁴⁹⁵ (Emphasis in original.) This verse does not in any conceivable way describe an abolition of the law (τὸ νόμος). Nevertheless, one can see how such a prophecy would play into Wagner's egalitarian sensibilities and even to his anarchic tendencies, were it not for the following verse, also cited, which mandates that "*he must rule till he put all his enemies under his feet.*"

⁴⁹² Ibid., 325-326; Luke 5:30.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 326 and Wagner, *Jesus von Nazareth* (1887), 74 and 2; Luke 19:8.

⁴⁹⁴ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 339; 1 Corinthians 15:56.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 336; 1 Corinthians 15:24.

Wagner mentions, without going into detail, the well-known episode of the Pericope Adulterae in John 8.⁴⁹⁶ This certainly serves as another blast against the hypocrisy of those who would condemn others while ignoring their own sin, and which he later echoes with the famed maxim, “Judge not that ye not be judged.”⁴⁹⁷ While there is no evidence that the adulteress in question threatened with stoning is Mary Magdalene, Wagner, as we have seen, nevertheless intended to composite this incident with that character, likely for the sake of dramatic simplicity, a not uncommon dramaturgical conceit.⁴⁹⁸

Wagner also attempts to portray Jesus as inverting the existing social hierarchy, though he to some extent contradicts himself in the process. On the one hand, we have Wagner repeating Jesus’s admonition that “the disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord;”⁴⁹⁹ on the other, he cites Jesus’s rhetorical question, “For whether is greater? he [sic] that sitteth at a table, or he that serveth?”⁵⁰⁰ This contradiction is to some extent resolved by the realization that the former verse occurs in the context of a warning of shared persecution, and the latter in a dispute of precedence among the disciples. The humility expressed in the latter verse is also contrasted with the “rule (κυριεύουσιν / herrschen)” of “the kings of this world,”⁵⁰¹ which is not to be emulated by Jesus’s followers, who should rather invert accepted notions of rank. Given what we know of Wagner’s anti-Catholicism, the inclusion of this passage could be interpreted

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 326.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 329; Matthew 7:1.

⁴⁹⁸ C.f., e.g., the 2004 film *The Passion of the Christ*.

⁴⁹⁹ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 329; Matthew 10:24.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 331; Luke 22:27.

⁵⁰¹ Actually, the kings “τῶν ἐθνῶν,” or “of the Gentiles,” which Luther translates as “weltlichen Könige.” Ibid.; Luke 22:25.

as a condemnation of any aspiration to the Church toward secular power. Likewise, although Wagner, at least for his own dramatic purposes, portrays Peter as a strong (though thoroughly human) character throughout *Jesus von Nazareth*, this passage could also be seen as a disavowal of the Catholic Church's notion of Petrine supremacy, given its emphasis on apostolic equality. Nevertheless, the coexistence of the humility of the believer with worldly powers does not seem to militate for the revolutionary overthrow thereof, as Wagner may have intended. Furthermore, intersecting with his focus on materialism, Wagner includes the well-known question regarding the propriety of giving tribute unto Caesar, which he goes so far as to italicize for emphasis.⁵⁰² Tellingly, however, he cannot bring himself to include Jesus's essentially affirmative response.

As has been discussed, at this point in Wagner's life, he was skeptical of the prevailing idea of marriage, since he viewed it as justifying the treatment of women as property. He cites Jesus's condemnation of the idea that it is lawful for a man to "put away," i.e., divorce (*ἀπολῦσαι* / *scheiden*), his wife, which had only been tolerated under the Mosaic law "because of the hardness of your hearts."⁵⁰³ Wagner's marriage must be one of love, and his Jesus affirms that this love makes such a union indissoluble. Wagner's own example in this regard was hypocritical in the extreme, as his serial philandering meant that his marriage vows were in reality honored in the breach. Wagner's numerous affairs caused his separation with his first wife, Minna, and these continued after her death and his marriage to Cosima, despite her utter devotion to him. It is indeed tempting to find in Wagner's theorizing on the unfree constraints of loveless marriage an attempt to justify his own libidinous libertinism.

⁵⁰² Ibid., 325; Matthew 22:17.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.; Matthew 19:8.

Wagner problematically cites Romans 10:4, “for Christ is the end of the Law; whoso believeth in him, he is righteous.” The original Greek for this verse reads “τέλος γὰρ νόμου Χριστὸς εἰς δικαιοσύνην παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι.” Luther translates this as “Denn Christus ist des Gesetzes Ende; wer an den glaubt, der ist gerecht.” The translation of τέλος as *Ende* is problematic in that it obscures an important shade of meaning. τέλος has more the connotation of the fulfillment of a goal or purpose and not merely a sense of chronological termination. *Ende* is perhaps better translated as “end” or “close” without necessarily implying goal-orientation, although, as with “end” in English, such an implication remains possible. A better, more goal-oriented term corresponding more closely to τέλος would be “Ziel,” although, as stated, *Ende* may still be acceptable. It appears, however, that the true intent of this verse, given the meaning of τέλος, is that Christ represents the fulfillment of the law rather than its abolition. The mere termination of the law would be better implied by “τελευτή” or “πέρας.” However, the antinomian and revolutionary-minded Wagner, working from Luther’s translation, could very likely have interpreted the verse, given Luther’s use of *Ende* rather than *Ziel*, to imply that Christ brought about the literal end of the law. This would represent a significant exegetical overreach, but it could have been justified in Wagner’s mind by Luther’s choice of diction. Indeed, as we will see, Wagner eventually came to see the freedom- and love-proclaiming Jesus of the New Testament as distinct from and superior to the vengeful, oppressive, and Semitic Jehova of the Old. An interpretation of this verse as describing Jesus as the abolitionist of the law rather than its fulfiller, though likely erroneous on hermeneutical grounds, would nevertheless dovetail nicely with Wagner’s general opposition to the law and legalism.

Wagner’s attempted abrogation of Jesus’s nomian telicity is further contradicted by his inclusion of Matthew 5:17, “Think not that I came to destroy the law and the prophets. I came

not to destroy, but to fulfil.”⁵⁰⁴ As is similarly the case regarding Romans 13:10, again analyzed below, there is no ambiguity in “πληρῶσαι” or “erfüllen;” the meaning conveyed is very much that of fulfillment rather than abolition.

This situation can be contrasted with that found in Romans 13:10, mentioned above, which describes love as the fulfillment of the law. Here there is less room for Luther to err, which therefore prevents Wagner from erring with him, as the Greek “πλήρωμα” has the very plain meaning of completion, which Luther accurately translates as “Erfüllung.” In this regard there is very clearly no ground for the conflation of completion and termination. Wagner is thus justified in connecting the application of the law, when proper and just, with love, wherein the neighborly expression of which every commandment is contained.

There are also translational difficulties inherent in Wagner’s citation of Galatians 3:24, which Ashton Ellis renders as “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster⁵⁰⁵ unto Christ, that we might become just by faith.”⁵⁰⁶ Paul’s Greek uses the perfect tense, γέγονεν, which would indicate that the law “has been” our schoolmaster, rather than simply “was” so, since the Greek perfect, unlike the aorist, conveys a sense of past action continuing into the present. This implies a sense of ongoing continuity that is lost in the simple past tense. The complicating problem arises in Luther’s translation, which renders γέγονεν as “ist gewesen;” since German uses the perfect and preterite tenses somewhat interchangeably, there is no sense of ongoing action,

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 333.

⁵⁰⁵ “παιδαγωγός,” which Luther masterfully translates as “Zuchtmeister.” The Greek term referred to a slave-tutor for upper-class boys, and “carries with it an idea of severity (as a stern censor and enforcer of morals).” (Thayer, s.v. “3807, παιδαγωγός,” 472.) A *Zuchtmeister* is likewise rather more a disciplinarian, taskmaster, and martinet than a mere teacher (“διδάσκαλος”). The thereby implied severity of the law (and of its requisite works) plays nicely into the Pauline-Lutheran-Wagnerian tendency toward antinomianism.

⁵⁰⁶ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 327.

which is reserved for the present tense.⁵⁰⁷ Such a translation again implies, somewhat questionably, that the law is ended and is no more, instead of continuing to have an effect. The issue is further complicated by the multifarious possible meanings of the Greek verb in question – γίνομαι – the fundamental meaning of which, though, is closer to “become” than to “be.” This is reflected in other German versions, such as that of Schlacter, who here translates γέγονεν as “ist geworden.” Furthermore, the following verse (25), also included by Wagner, more or less unambiguously states, “But now that faith is come, we no longer are under the schoolmaster,”⁵⁰⁸ leading one to believe that the law is in fact at an end. The confusion is perhaps resolved by the realization that the law continues to function as a preparatory mechanism for Christ, i.e., that we are repeatedly “becoming” under the law.⁵⁰⁹ This is not an interpretation which Wagner could have made given the lacking sense of continuity in Luther’s translation. Justification through faith (in Christ) does not nullify the law but rather removes the believer from being solely “under” it, just as the social norms which the schoolmaster had sought to impart to his pupil still exist and are obeyed once the tutelage has ended. Again, Wagner would instead be prone to an outright rejection of the law based on the sense of Luther’s translation.

This conclusion is further buttressed by Wagner’s citation of Hebrews 8:13, which discusses the suppletion of the old covenant⁵¹⁰ by the new, concluding that “that which is old and

⁵⁰⁷ There remains, of course, the phenomenon of historical drift in the temporal emphasis of grammatical aspect. Nevertheless, the modern German version of the Luther Bible, published in 1984, retains the “ist gewesen” construction.

⁵⁰⁸ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 327.

⁵⁰⁹ Thayer comments as follows (s.v. “3807, παιδαγωγός,” 472.): “the Mosaic law is likened to a tutor because it arouses consciousness of sin, and is called παιδαγωγός εἰς Χριστόν, i.e. preparing the soul for Christ, because those who have learned by experience with the law that they are not and cannot be commended to God by their works, welcome the more eagerly the hope of salvation offered them through the death and resurrection of Christ, the Son of God.”

⁵¹⁰ “διαθήκη” in Hebrews 8:6, which Luther renders “Testament.”

belated, is near to its end.”⁵¹¹ In this instance, the translation by Luther on which Wagner relied again uses “Ende,” while the original Greek ἀφανισμοῦ⁵¹² has more the meaning of “disappearance,” and can moreover mean “extermination;” therefore, more appropriate German options would include “Verschwinden” or “Aussterben.” In light of the analysis of Romans 10:4 presented above, Luther’s use of Ende to render both τέλος and ἀφανισμοῦ in German demonstrates a somewhat haphazard regard for the niceties of semantic subtlety. One can see, therefore, that the possibility exists for misinterpretation, willful or otherwise, on Wagner’s part. One can very easily see the strength of the connection that would be created in his mind between the “Gesetz” mentioned in Romans and the “Testament” of Hebrews when both are said to be meeting their “Ende,” despite the aforementioned differences in the underlying Greek. While the law could more properly be said to be fulfilled in Christ, rather than abrogated by him, and the old covenant to therefore be vanishing, Wagner, in his fairly feverish antinomianism, made use of Luther’s somewhat inadequate translation to envision Christ as the outright destroyer of both the law and the old covenant.

Wagner also makes reference to Galatians 4, beginning with verse 22, the text of which he does actually include, but instead marks as “*Important!* (Wichtig!).”⁵¹³ The passage concerns an allegory of the two children of Abraham, born respectively free and enslaved, who correspond to the two covenants, with the enslaved prevailing as the present Jerusalem, but the inheritance belonging to the free son. Wagner therefore would see the ending of the old covenant as

⁵¹¹ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 336-337.

⁵¹² Genitive of ἀφανισμός.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, 336.

particularly justified, since it is born of slavery rather than of a “promise (ἐπαγγελίας / Verheißung),” which equates to freedom.⁵¹⁴

Materialism

The third area of scriptural emphasis for Wagner is his opposition to materialism. Early on, Jesus proclaims that his ministry (specifically, the proclamation of the Gospel) is directed at the poor.⁵¹⁵ The term for the poor used here, πτωχοῖς, carries with it the implication of extreme poverty, as further elucidated elsewhere. Luther’s “Armen” does not entirely capture its full meaning.⁵¹⁶ Wagner could again largely unknowingly seize on this discrepancy to broaden his understanding of Jesus’s most directly-targeted demographic from the truly miserable to the greater proletarian mass, thus enhancing the revolutionary appeal of the message. This would certainly be in keeping with Wagner’s personification of the “Volk” almost as a unitary character, or *dramatis persona*, unto itself. This conclusion is somewhat reinforced by the further litany of “interest groups,” as it were, to whom Jesus describes himself as being sent:⁵¹⁷ “the broken-hearted ... the captives ... the blind ... the downtrod.”⁵¹⁸ Wagner echoes this definition of Jesus’s audiential reach in Matthew 11:5, which, in addition to the evangelization of the poor, mentions the healing of the blind, the lepers, the deaf, and the raising of the dead.⁵¹⁹ In all of

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.; Galatians 4:28.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 325; Luke 4:18.

⁵¹⁶ Unless otherwise specified, further references to the poor employ variants of πτωχός or *Arme*.

⁵¹⁷ “ἀπέσταλκέν,” which properly refers to being sent on a mission defined by a superior, i.e., in this case, from God.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., 325; Luke 4:18.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 330.

these cases, but particularly in the latter, the means of regeneration is assuredly miraculous and supernatural, which originally could be seen as reinforcing Jesus's Godhood. However, it also has the effect of placing the rehabilitation of the poor on a similarly spiritual plane, which, intended or not, removes Wagner's Jesus from the "practical" (or "scientific" in the Marxian sense) focus on poverty and places its amelioration squarely in the spiritual realm. As strange as it may seem, this would not necessarily be out of place in Wagner's mentality, as since we have seen that he envisioned a similar revolutionary and spiritually regenerating role for his music in *Die Kunst und die Revolution*.

Wagner's valorization of the poor pales in comparison to his vituperative condemnation of the rich. Wagner particularly sees the excessive accumulation of wealth and material goods as execrable. The solution for the rich, then, is the abandonment of their possessions. We are told to "take heed and beware of covetousness, for no man's life consisteth in that he hath many possessions!"; this is followed by the parable of the rich man who unwisely sought to stockpile the fruits of his fields when his own mortality was in fact imminent.⁵²⁰ As previously described, Wagner makes the episode of Zacchaeus a particular point of emphasis.⁵²¹ Also as aforementioned, he describes the selfish withholding of "this world's goods" from a "brother in need" as an impediment to the indwelling of God's love.⁵²² Particularly in the case of Zacchaeus, Wagner chooses to stress a verse which seems to advocate not simply a more equitable distribution of economic resources, but moreover a penitential and perhaps punitive monetary reallocation over and above the actual requirements of the impoverished, as the gains in question

⁵²⁰ Ibid., 330-331; Luke 12:15-20.

⁵²¹ Ibid., 326; Luke 19:8.

⁵²² Ibid., 327-328; 1 John 3:17.

are implied to be ill-gotten. Having need (“χρείαν ἔχοντα”) in the example from 1 John is defined by Thayer as to have need “absolutely;” Luther somewhat freely translates this as “darben,” which could imply either literal starvation or simply a more abstract suffering of want.⁵²³ This ambiguity could lead Wagner to impugn more strongly the heartlessness of uncharitableness. The “goods” in question, are, moreover, “βίον τοῦ κόσμου,” or “dieser Welt Güter” in Luther’s parlance. βίος (in the nominative) is more properly life itself, in the physical sense, though it also can refer to “that by which life is sustained.”⁵²⁴ Denial thereof, therefore, would be a more pitiless act than the withholding of mere abstract “goods,” which certainly conforms with Wagner’s intended message.

Continuing in the vein of economic leveling, Wagner references 2 Corinthians 8, a passage sometimes taken as buttressing the philosophical viewpoint of “distributism;” i.e., the equitable distribution of wealth for the common good, yet without the abandonment of private property.⁵²⁵

*So let your superfluity supply their want, that thereafter their abundance also may supply your want, and there may be equality, as standeth written: He that hath gathered much, had no excess, and he that had gathered little, had no lack.*⁵²⁶

The quotation contained within this passage is in fact a near-paraphrase of Exodus 16:18 from the Septuagint.⁵²⁷ Its inclusion represents a breakdown, perhaps unwitting, of Wagner’s

⁵²³ Thayer, s.v. “5532, χρεία,” 670-671.

⁵²⁴ Thayer, s.v. “979, βίος,” 102. Ζωή, also meaning life, would also have the more abstract connotation of “existence.” κόσμος (nominative of κόσμου) is itself an ambiguous term.

⁵²⁵ Cf., e.g., Pius XI’s *Quadragesimo Anno*, section 58, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/library/docs/pi11qa.htm>.

⁵²⁶ Emphasis in original. Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 332-333; 2 Corinthians 8:14-15.

⁵²⁷ Cf.: “... whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack...” (English Standard Version).

otherwise apparent attempt to exclude the Old Testament from his scriptural citations. Its meaning, as noted, does not appear to support the more radical intent to which Wagner would ascribe it. This becomes readily apparent when it is realized that the context of these verses is that of fidelity to the example of Christ, as “though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”⁵²⁸ To begin with, the richness and poverty here referenced seem to refer primarily to spiritual rather than to monetary well-being. The Greek “ἐπτώχευσεν (he became destitute),”⁵²⁹ is found nowhere else in the New Testament (a *hapax legomenon*), with its unfamiliarity lending credence to a more metaphorical Pauline intent, especially when one considers that Christ the carpenter was never actually financially well-off. Wagner himself depicts Jesus’s personal example of poverty and humility; while even animals have their resting places, “the Son of man hath nowhere to lay his head.”⁵³⁰ In any event, the overall message of 2 Corinthians 8 is one of voluntary charity. Wagner also includes verse 12, which seems to convey the proviso that the motivating intention behind charity is the true basis for its ethical evaluation, rather the amount given; “For if a man is willing (Denn so einer willig ist), he is acceptable according to what he hath, not according to what he hath not.”⁵³¹ The will or readiness in question is in fact “προθυμία,” literally “pre-spirit” or “before-passion,” and reflects an already existing inclination⁵³² which is “πρόκειται,” meaning not just present, but again

⁵²⁸ 2 Corinthians 8:9.

⁵²⁹ Luther employs “ward er doch arm um euretwillen.”

⁵³⁰ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 329; Matthew 8:20.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, 332.

⁵³² Biblehub, s.v. “4288. prothumia,” in *HELPS Word-studies*. In the Platonic division of the psyche, θυμός represented emotion or passion. The Platonic influence on Paul is a matter of some debate. See F.F. Powell, “St. Paul’s Homage to Plato,” accessed November 27, <http://www.worldandi.com/newhome/public/2004/April/mtpub2.asp>.

literally “pre-sent” or “set-before;” in short, the will is already there.⁵³³ As seen above, Luther’s translation does not preserve this notion of pre-existing will. The true intent of this passage, then, appears in its dependence on autonomous, uncoerced, personal disposition to echo the Kantian motivational ethical perspective rather than serving as any sort of proto-politico-economic framework.

Wagner repeats the New Testament’s fairly constant refrain of a bifurcation between the material and the spiritual, e.g., “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth ... but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven,” since the former are subject to the ravages of time (“moth and rust”) and theft, while the latter are not.⁵³⁴ This is followed by the injunction that “No man can serve two masters,” as he must either hate or love one or the other; therefore, “Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” Mammon, transliterated from the Aramaic, refers unequivocally to material riches, and is preserved unchanged by Luther. However, the immediately following verses, which Wagner repeats, explicate this maxim in terms that immediately bring to mind the aforementioned βίος, as Jesus denigrates anxiety for food and shelter, i.e., the means of life. There thus appears to be some conflation between goods of excess (mammon) and of necessity. This allows Wagner to essentially lump both into the former, more denigratory category.

Wagner then emphatically quotes Jesus’s following rhetorical question, “*Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit (πῆχυν / Elle) unto his stature (ἡλικίαν / Länge)?*”⁵³⁵ This verse has a somewhat ambiguous meaning, and it is frequently taken in English to refer instead to the

⁵³³ Thayer, s.v. “4295, πρόκειμαι,” 540. Thayer comments that in this verse it refers to presence “so that it can become actual or available,” i.e., actualized.

⁵³⁴ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 328, Matthew 6:19.

⁵³⁵ Emphasis in original. *Ibid.*, 329; Matthew 6:27 and Luke 12:25.

addition of an hour to one's life. Both interpretations are possible.⁵³⁶ However, Wagner parenthetically comments that "no man can become richer in himself than he is, but in his brethren he can become more than a thousandfold of what he is." It is unclear how he arrives at this conclusion, since while the verse seems to support Wagner's initial notion of self-limitation, it by no means extends this to a call for communal or socialistic enhancement. Indeed, the following verses concern the providence of God for man rather than that of man for his fellow man.⁵³⁷ Wagner's communalistic interpretation here certainly represents an overreach on his part.

The same can be said of what in Wagner's nomenclature appears to be a citation from 1 Corinthians 9, "Ich suche nicht was mir, sondern was Vielen frommet."⁵³⁸ Ashton Ellis translates this as "I seek not what shall profit myself, but what shall profit many."⁵³⁹ In reality, this is an incomplete paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 10:33.⁵⁴⁰ Wagner crucially omits the final words of the verse, "that they might be saved." The "profit" of the many over the self is therefore in no sense economic but rather salvific. The term for "profit" here, moreover, is *σύνφορον*, meaning literally to "carry with," and thus to "bring together" or "combine," and it in part alludes to the differences among Jews and Greeks mentioned in the preceding verse. The intent here is therefore on the preservation of unity and the avoidance of a scenario in which cultural

⁵³⁶ This also ties in to the anxiety previously discussed by Jesus, as both "μεριμνῶν" and "sorget" convey more a sense of worry than mere "taking thought."

⁵³⁷ "For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." (Matthew 6:32-33, English Standard Version).

⁵³⁸ Wagner, *Jesus von Nazareth* (1887), 85.

⁵³⁹ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 332.

⁵⁴⁰ Luther's original in fact reads "gleichwie ich auch jedermann in allerlei mich gefällig mache und suche nicht, was mir, sondern was vielen frommt, daß sie selig werden."

differences might be transformed into spiritual ones. Furthermore, Luther comments in a sermon that this verse represents a warning against “the indiscreet exercise of Christian liberty, which offends the weak in faith ... every man should look after the things of others. Then no offence will be given.”⁵⁴¹ Therefore, although this verse does inveigh against excessive self-interest, the implication that it calls for a radical utilitarianism (or “the best for the most,” as John Stuart Mill would have it) would be incorrect. The focus is on comity rather than economy.

Wagner engages in further deception concerning Acts 4, from which he purports there is a verse stating “*Keiner sage von seinen Gütern, dass sie sein wären, sondern es sei euch Alles gemein.*”⁵⁴² “Sage” and “sei” here are in the subjunctive mood and imply a third person imperative, i.e., a command. The mood of these verbs is out of accord both with Luther’s translation (“sagte” and “war”) and with the original Greek (“ἔλεγεν” and “ἦν”), as all of these verbs are conjugated in various forms of past indicative. Ashton Ellis translates this as “*Let none say of his goods that they are his, but let all be in common among you.*”⁵⁴³ However, there is no extant verse which conforms to Wagner’s citation as originally phrased. The closest correspondence would be to Acts 4:32, the relevant section of which reads, “...no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.”⁵⁴⁴ The

⁵⁴¹ Martin Luther, “Sermon on the First Sunday in Lent,” trans. anonymous, accessed November 27, 2013, http://www.godrules.net/library/luther/129luther_g11.htm. Original German version: “...da durch unzeitigen Brauch christlicher Freiheit die Schwachen im Glauben geärgert werden... dass ein iglicher [jeglicher] soll wahrnehmen was des andern, und nicht was sein ist; so bleiben alle Aergerniß wohl stille.” (Martin Luther, *Dr. Martin Luther’s Sämmtliche Werke* [Frankfurt am Main: Heyder & Zimmer, 1867], 134, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=d-HxnTn7430C>.)

⁵⁴² Emphasis in original. Wagner, *Jesus von Nazareth* (1887), 96.

⁵⁴³ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 338.

⁵⁴⁴ English Standard Version. Luther concurs that the Greek verbs (“ἔλεγεν” and “ἦν”) should be rendered in the indicative rather than in the imperative or subjunctive, viz.: “keiner sagte von seinen Gütern, daß sie sein wären, sondern es war ihnen alles gemein.”

effect of Wagner's manipulation is to imply that this communitarianism is or should be mandatory, whereas in reality it is the product of personal conviction (cf. Corinthians 9:7),⁵⁴⁵ a common error regarding the implementation of a sort of Christian communism. Again we find Wagner trying unjustifiably to cast the Christian message into a more revolutionary mold.

Wagner is quick to conflate greed and theft and to contrast these vices with more virtuous means of sustenance. Again quoting Paul, Wagner repeats, "Let him that stole, steal no more, but labour and work with his hands a thing that is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth."⁵⁴⁶ The "work" here is in fact "κοπιᾶτω," a command to physically toil to exhaustion; Luther's attempt to convey this intensity is "arbeite und schaffe." Wagner could easily take this verse to allege an implied condemnation, or at least lesser-worthiness, of non-manual labor, in which he himself, of course, did not engage. "Give (geben)" in this verse is moreover not simple, undifferentiated giving, but is the representation of the compound verb "μεταδιδόναι," indicating bestowal, or a definite transfer of ownership.

Wagner also employs the oft-quoted pronouncement of James 4:2, "Ye are greedy, and gain nothing by it; ye hate and envy, and win nothing by it; ye strive and war, and ye have naught."⁵⁴⁷ This is a fairly poor translation, in part the case because Ashton Ellis preserves Wagner's own misquotation of Luther, whose translation in turn is itself somewhat at variance with the Greek. To begin with, "greed" is in fact not specifically referenced, but rather

⁵⁴⁵ "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (English Standard Version).

⁵⁴⁶ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 333; Ephesians 4:28. "κλέπτων" and "κλεπτέτω" carry the connotation of not just mere robbery, but theft by stealth (as does Luther's "gestohlen"); certainly a more deceptive transgression, and therefore one more deserving of remediation.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 337.

“ἐπιθυμεῖτε,” which means “you all desire” or “covet.”⁵⁴⁸ There is also the problem that “nothing (οὐδέν)” is never mentioned in the original, so that Wagner’s phrases like “you have nothing,” etc., are more properly translated as “you do not have.” Wagner in fact in several places in this verse replaces Luther’s more accurate “nicht (not)” with “nichts (nothing),” thereby subverting the meaning.⁵⁴⁹ While the difference between not having and having nothing may appear to be minor, the former formulation conveys a more abstract sense of want, while the latter implies a more literal, visceral poverty with its focus on a positive sense of nominal emptiness rather than verbal negation. Wagner’s alteration here is textually unjustified but serves the purpose of reinforcing his more anti-materialistic outlook. Furthermore, Wagner crucially omits the final clause of the verse (included by Luther), which explains that “you do not have, *because you do not ask.*”⁵⁵⁰ There is therefore no ground to make a case for an impoverishment due to oppression or other social inequality, in that the deprivation in question is not due to greed but rather to a lack of communication, presumably with God; that is, to a failure to pray. Moreover, the following verse makes clear that the communicative failure is one of mere absence but also of inappropriate method.⁵⁵¹ Despite its inconsistencies, this entire passage seems somewhat

⁵⁴⁸ Luther’s “Ihr seid begierig” is comparable in meaning. Lest we be misled, though, greed specifically of money would be “φιλοχρηματία” or “φιλαργυρία.” It should also be mentioned that the subjective “you” throughout this verse is in fact plural (“ye”), which is preserved in the German. The effect of this reference to a group rather than to an individual is to remove the directness of the admonition in the reader’s mind, since the “you all” in question can be thought of as referring more to the original recipients of the epistle than as referring to an impersonalized “you” that also encompasses the reader himself.

⁵⁴⁹ For comparison, “οὐκ ἔχετε” is variously translated by Luther as “Ihr habt nicht,” and by Wagner as “ihr habt nichts.” (Wagner, *Jesus von Nazareth* [1887], 93.)

⁵⁵⁰ English Standard Version. (“οὐκ ἔχετε διὰ τὸ μὴ αἰτεῖσθαι ὑμᾶς.”)

⁵⁵¹ “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly (κακῶς – actually ‘evilly’), to spend it on your passions.” (James 4:3, English Standard Version).

ironically to foreshadow Wagner's later embrace of Schopenhauer, as its condemnation of desire and of striving is fairly congruous with Schopenhauer's doctrine of the renunciation of the will.

Wagner does locate passages in which wealth is specifically condemned. In 1 Timothy 6, Wagner finds the pronouncement that "*covetousness (φιλαργυρία / Geiz) is a root of all evil, which hath seduced many, etc.*"⁵⁵² This covetousness is indeed an avaricious love of money, though the Greek emphasizes its excessive acquisition, while the German connotes more penuriousness or reluctance in disbursement. Both senses suit Wagner's purpose, though the latter is more in line with his moral and ethical recoil from materialism, as it more negatively impacts one's fellow man. The entire preceding passage, however, seems to be more a condemnation of excess than of miserliness:

For we brought nothing into the world, wherefore it is certain we can carry nothing out. But having food and raiment, let us be content. For they that would be rich, they fall into temptation and a snare, and many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in perdition and damnation.⁵⁵³

The food referred to here is "διατροφᾶς," which is not merely food, but food sufficing for sustenance, and hence implies a sort of minimalism which is not entirely preserved in Luther's "Nahrung." The "perdition and damnation" mentioned are "ὄλεθρον καὶ ἀπώλειαν," both of which could be translated as "destruction," but which both more strongly convey a sense of loss or undoing rather than outright annihilation.⁵⁵⁴ The implication, then, is that the rich will be punished rather than simply destroyed, suggesting, in metaphysical terms, a sort of fate worse than death, but in narrower terms, also lending credence to Wagner's conception of a socio-economic reordering.

⁵⁵² Emphasis in original. Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 333; 1 Timothy 6:10.

⁵⁵³ Ibid.; 1 Timothy 6:7-9.

⁵⁵⁴ Cf. Luther's "Verderben und Verdammnis."

Conversely, Wagner takes pains to portray charity as a virtue, most prominently with the famous injunction that “it is more blessed to give than receive.”⁵⁵⁵ Wagner follows this with an exclamatory parenthetical observation, “(Antithesis to: Thou shalt not steal!)”⁵⁵⁶ This is dubious analysis at best. To begin with, the verse occurs in the larger context of Paul declaiming to his Ephesian audience that the admonition to give rather than to receive was originally spoken by Jesus himself. However, there is no verbatim evidence in the Gospel accounts of Jesus having ever said this.⁵⁵⁷ While the sentiment of the statement is certainly in accord with the overall spirit of Christ’s message, Wagner’s use of it as a characterizing element of the man Jesus himself is somewhat questionable. Nevertheless, since Wagner, as noted, makes little distinction between the Gospel and non-Gospel components of the New Testament, its inclusion is still in line with his overall method. Further complicating matters is the problematical Greek verb “λαμβάνειν,” which can mean both “to receive” and “to take,” depending on context. Luther’s “nehmen” has some of the same ambiguity, but overall more strongly connotes “to take.” In Wagner’s mind, then, there would be a greater emphasis on the activity of taking rather than on the passivity of receiving, and the former would be more condemnable in terms of selfishness or greed. In fact, the verse’s true meaning, while ambiguous, may lie somewhere closer on the continuum to mere reception rather than to outright theft.

⁵⁵⁵ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 326; Acts 20:35.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.; Exodus 20:15.

⁵⁵⁷ Some have attempted to work around this discrepancy by citing John 20:30 and John 21:25, which essentially assert that Jesus said and did much else besides that which has been recorded. However, when taken to its logical conclusion, such a line of reasoning would essentially give carte blanche for the attribution to Jesus of any action whatsoever. In another vein, since the scholarly consensus has regarded Luke the Evangelist to have been the author of Acts, one would assume that given his eyewitness experience of Jesus’s life, Luke would not include a statement attributed to Jesus while knowing that such an assertion was incorrect. On the other hand, if Jesus did make this utterance, why would Luke have not included it in his own Gospel?

Most egregious, though, is Wagner's attempt to define this exhortation to charity as the "antithesis (Gegensatz)" to the Decalogue's forbiddance of thievery.⁵⁵⁸ (The Hebrew of Exodus, "גְּזֵלָה," may have originally referred to the stealing of persons, i.e., kidnapping or slavery, but a "material goods stolen by stealth" interpretation is also applicable, along the lines of κλεπτέτω.) Logically speaking, it is not apparent why the relationship between these commandments should be antithetical. Giving and receiving are both performed of free will, in contrast to the compulsion of theft, and Wagner appears to be engaging in an apples and oranges comparison. Most obviously, though, there remains the fact that stealing is condemned by Jesus and by others continuously throughout the New Testament (and is, as we have seen, cited as such by Wagner on several occasions), raising serious doubt that its prohibition has been antithesized.⁵⁵⁹ It appears that Wagner's primary interest here again lies in the abrogation of the Hebrew Law and the Old (Mosaic or Sinaitic) Covenant. In Wagner's defense, at least on a prima facie level, he could perhaps be intending a reference to the section of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount known as the "Antitheses," in which he explains his interpretation of the law.⁵⁶⁰ However, none of the antitheses described by Jesus in Matthew 5 specifically address stealing. The closest comparisons can be made with verses 40 and 42, which reverse the notion of "an eye for an eye." Respectively, these verses declare "And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well," and, "Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one

⁵⁵⁸ Wagner, *Jesus von Nazareth* (1887), 75.

⁵⁵⁹ Cf., e.g., Luke 18:20, Mark 10:19, Matthew 19:18, 1 Peter 4:15, and Ephesians 4:28. There is also Romans 2:17-21, which condemns the hypocrisy of preaching against stealing while engaging in it oneself, and of simultaneously deeming oneself a Jew under the Law. If Wagner was cognizant of this passage, it would no doubt reinforce his anti-Semitism.

⁵⁶⁰ Marcion of Sinope, to whom it will be shown that Wagner's views bear some resemblance, authored a document known as the *Antithesis*, which has been partially reconstructed (trans. Daniel J. Mahar, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.marcionite-scripture.info/antithesis.html>), that contrasts the differences between the two testaments.

who would borrow from you.”⁵⁶¹ They thus address theft and charity, but not the idea of stealing from others. Rather, they essentially state that one should allow oneself to be stolen from, in the form of an abundantly charitable disposition. Moreover, it must be said (and it can be seen in these verses) that far from constituting a condemnation of the requirements of the Law, Jesus’s pronouncements in these montane Antitheses in fact call for a stricter adherence thereto and even for a humility and piety surpassing thereof. Wagner’s sought-after abrogation of the Law in this regard therefore ironically turns out to result in, if anything, a doubling-down on its motivating spirit.

Wagner also detects an emphasis on manual labor and self-reliance as themselves actually enabling charity, as explained in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12: “So strive ye to be quiet, and do your own business and labour with your own hands, as we commanded you, that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and need nothing of theirs.”⁵⁶² The stress here is fact not merely on aiding the needy, but on not becoming needy oneself. To Wagner’s credit, these verses do reinforce his sense of a more communitarian ethos, as the second person plural used throughout the passage, though unseen in the English translation, is readily apparent in the Greek and German, and conveys the notion of working together with others in a group setting, and not just for oneself. However, it is not entirely clear that “them that are without” actually refers to the materially impoverished, as “τοὺς ἔξω” and “die draußen sind” relate a more literally locative sense of outside-ness than of objective lacking. Thayer in fact considers that in this particular context, “ἔξω” is used to distinguish “those who are not among the number of the apostles.”⁵⁶³ It

⁵⁶¹ English Standard Version.

⁵⁶² Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 333.

⁵⁶³ Thayer, s.v. “1854, ἔξω,” 226.

therefore appears that Wagner again wrongly conceives of a material distinction when “them that are without” does not mean the poor but instead those outside of the Church.

Wagner, though he omits the famous metaphor of the camel passing through the eye of the needle, does attempt to portray holiness and wealth as intrinsically incompatible. In describing God’s immanence, Wagner cites the assertion that Godhead is not “like unto images of gold, or silver, or marble, made by thoughts of man,” since man himself is “of a race divine (γένος ... τοῦ θεοῦ / göttlichen Geschlechts).”⁵⁶⁴ (Again defying Wagner’s attempted Old Testament exclusion, this verse recalls the Decalogue’s prohibition of idolatry.)⁵⁶⁵ There is additionally Wagner’s citation of the condemnation of the “school-wranglings of men deranged of mind and bereft of truth, *who suppose that godliness is a trade* (πορισμὸν / Gewerbe).”⁵⁶⁶ However, “πορισμός” (in the nominative) emphasizes the specificity of a means or source of livelihood or gain, rather the abstraction of trade or business in and of itself.⁵⁶⁷ Thus, while Wagner, based on Luther’s translation, would deride the connection of trade to piety outright (perhaps in the context of anti-clericalism), a more nuanced view of the Greek source identifies inappropriate *means* of gain as objectionable, rather than the *end* of gain outright. This is particularly clear when it is realized that “school-wranglings,” derived from Luther’s “Schulgezänke,” are in fact “διαπαρατριβαί,” literally “misemployment,” implying that proper employment is in fact possible.⁵⁶⁸ Indeed, the rest of this passage, which, as we have seen,

⁵⁶⁴ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 336; Acts 17:29.

⁵⁶⁵ Exodus 20:4-5.

⁵⁶⁶ Emphasis in original. Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 336; 1 Timothy 6:5.

⁵⁶⁷ Cf. Thayer, s.v. “4200, πορισμός,” 531.

⁵⁶⁸ Alternatively, “παραδιατριβή” or “παραδιατριβαί” in some texts. Cf. Ibid., s.v. “3859, παραδιατριβή,” 480.

Wagner cites elsewhere, spells out punishment for the “foolish and hurtful lusts” of the rich, rather than for richness per se.

We also hear from Wagner, in the context of the Parable of the Sower, that the seed “which was sown among the thorns, is he that heareth the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he bringeth forth no fruit.”⁵⁶⁹ In all translations, though, it is clear that wealth in and of itself is not condemned, but rather that wealth which seeks to deceive, defraud, or swindle (“ἀπάτη” / “Betrug”). Furthermore, the parable makes plain, particularly in its Markan version, that riches are but one impediment among sundry other desires (“τὰ λοιπὰ ἐπιθυμίας” / “viele andere Lüste”). This realization takes on further weight in light of the theory of Markan priority, the present majority scholarly viewpoint, which asserts the Gospel of Mark as the base document from which the other Synoptic Gospels were derived. Wagner in this regard again engages in a rhetorically over-emphasized anti-materialism.

Finally, Wagner accepts that a failure to renounce materialism is worthy of judgment. His inclusion of James 5 is emblematic:

Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your misery shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is rusted, and their rust shall be a witness unto you, and shall eat your flesh as a fire. Ye have gathered your treasures for the last days. Ye have condemned and killed the just, and he did not resist you.⁵⁷⁰

Wagner’s citation confusingly omits verses 4-5 of this chapter, which actually make his case even more strongly, as they directly indict those who have defrauded their workers and field-hands in order to live lives of self-indulgent extravagance, which is the exact sort of inequality against which Wagner rails most vociferously. However, verse 6 of this passage is problematic, in that the exact identity of “the just (one) (τὸν δίκαιον / den Gerechten)” who has been killed is

⁵⁶⁹ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 337; Matthew 13:22. Cf. Mark 4:19.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 333; James 5:1-3 and 6.

uncertain. Commentators have variously identified this as either as Jesus, or as the aforementioned mistreated workers, or as righteous persons generally, or even as James of Jerusalem, nicknamed “the Just,” the traditional author of the epistle in question, who was later martyred, and whose possible fraternal relationship with Jesus is disputed. It is unclear to which of these interpretations Wagner would hold, though it should be pointed out that Martin Luther, whose heavy influence on Wagner we have seen, denigrated the Book of James due to its seeming clash with Pauline justification by faith, and in fact derided it as “an epistle full of straw.”⁵⁷¹

In any event, Wagner also references the entirety of Revelation 18, without directly quoting it, which describes the Fall of Babylon, and hence also condemns the luxury, immorality, and inequity thereof. This most prophetic book of the New Testament assuredly is in line with Wagner’s conception of a coming reckoning for the rich. However, one must also consider that Wagner’s entire outlook on Jesus-as-revolutionary, and his fixation on Christ’s ministry and ethical principles, seems to be a call for action in the present moment and a shunting aside of the prophetic notion of a Second Coming (*παρουσία*). This reflects the possible influence of several related interpretative concepts, the first being preterism, which holds that the eschatological prophecies of the New Testament have already been partially or completely fulfilled, most notably in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. A more extreme view is realized (or sapiential) eschatology, which sees the eschaton as having already occurred during the earthly ministry of Jesus. This view is itself moderated in the form of inaugurated eschatology, in which the end

⁵⁷¹ Daniel W. Petty, “Martin Luther’s View of the Book of James,” accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.lessonsonline.info/LutherandJames.htm>. This does not seem to have deterred Wagner from making his multiple citations of the epistle, which has an aphoristic style that makes it in some ways the Proverbs of the New Testament, and which lends itself to the condemnation of materialistic vices.

times were begun during Jesus's life but have not yet been completed. Sapiential eschatology in particular views existence as a process of continually "becoming" rather than the awaiting of an apocalypse, to the extent that "apocalyptic eschatology is world-negation stressing imminent divine intervention: we wait for God to act; sapiential eschatology is world-negation emphasizing immediate divine imitation: God waits for us to act."⁵⁷² The notion of "world-negation" should, of course immediately bring to mind the Will-negation of Schopenhauer which would come to dominate Wagner's in his career following *Jesus von Nazareth*.

Revolution

We have seen that many of Wagner's scriptural selections have seemingly cast Jesus in a revolutionary light, though sometimes at the expense of context. These verses have been "revolutionary" in an implied sense (that is, in their overtones) in that Wagner seems to imply that revolution is a precondition of the implementation of the social changes which he suggests that they envision. There are a few passages in particular that Wagner seems to use to allude to revolution itself. One of these is Jesus's already-discussed declaration that "I came not to send peace, but the sword." The word in question translated as "sword," "μάχαιραν," could *prima facie* be interpreted in broader terms, and thus also less bellicosely, as it is used in the Septuagint, and in other literature, to convey the meaning of a "knife;"⁵⁷³ however, Thayer concludes that in the New Testament, it "universally" means a sword, in the sense of "a weapon for making or repelling an attack."⁵⁷⁴ Nevertheless, this passage has also been interpreted as predicting

⁵⁷² John Dominic Crossan, *The Essential Jesus: Original Sayings and Earliest Images* (San Francisco: Harper-Collins, 1998), 8.

⁵⁷³ I.e., in Genesis 22:6 and 10 and Judges 19:29.

⁵⁷⁴ Thayer, s.v. "3162, μάχαιρα," 393.

ideological strife rather than physical violence, since its parallel in Luke opposes peace to “division (διαμερισμόν / Zwietracht)” rather than to a sword.⁵⁷⁵ Wagner does not include this contrasting Lucan verse. The contrast of division with peace is particularly apparent when one realizes that εἰρήνην, “peace,” derives from εἰρεῖν, meaning “to join or tie together,” thus setting wholeness against division. Both Matthew and Luke additionally qualify this peace as not being brought about “on earth,”⁵⁷⁶ leaving open the possibility of heavenly peace as a succor for earthly conflict.⁵⁷⁷

On the other hand, Wagner also omits verses which would seem to strengthen his argument, such as Luke 22:36, commanding anyone unarmed to sell his cloak and buy a sword. It has been speculated, however, that this statement was made by Jesus not as a call to self-defense (the apostles subsequently produced only the militarily-inadequate quantity of two swords),⁵⁷⁸ but with an eye toward the fulfillment of prophecy, namely Isaiah 53:11-12, which states that “the righteous one” was “numbered with transgressors,” though he intercedes on behalf of them.⁵⁷⁹ The “transgression” would be Jesus’s arrest at Gethsemane shortly thereafter, where Wagner does, however, include Jesus’s command to Peter (only identified explicitly as such in John 18:11) to “put up thy sword” after the latter had struck one of the accosters.⁵⁸⁰ But despite this, Wagner omits Jesus’s miraculous healing of the man whose ear had thereby been

⁵⁷⁵ Luke 12:51.

⁵⁷⁶ “ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν” and “ἐν τῇ γῆ” in Matthew and Luke, respectively.

⁵⁷⁷ Compare to the traditional theological doctrine of the Church Militant (*Ecclesia Militans*) and Church Triumphant (*Ecclesia Triumphans*).

⁵⁷⁸ Luke 22:38.

⁵⁷⁹ English Standard Version.

⁵⁸⁰ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 293.

severed,⁵⁸¹ and he also leaves out the famous pronouncement of Matthew 26:52, moralizing on the episode, that “all who take the sword will perish by the sword;”⁵⁸² nor does he include the echo of this sentiment in Revelation 13:10.⁵⁸³

But returning to the opposite perspective, Wagner likewise ignores what is perhaps among the most bellicose-sounding of Jesus’s statements, found in the conclusion of the Lucan version of the parable of the talents: “But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter (κατασφάζατε / erwürget) them before me.”⁵⁸⁴ Despite this verse’s apparent function as metaphor in the context of a parable, its attribution of the command in question to a self-admittedly unethical king,⁵⁸⁵ and its contradiction of Jesus’s other statements concerning those who reject him (e.g., in Luke 9:52-55),⁵⁸⁶ it has nevertheless historically been employed as either a call for Christian violence or as a means for the condemnation of Christianity on grounds thereof. This can be seen going as far back as St. John Chrysostom’s fourth-century homilies *Katà Ioudaίων*,⁵⁸⁷ which employ Luke 19:27 to justify the persecution (and indeed the killing) of the Jews.⁵⁸⁸ This resort to religious coercion is also

⁵⁸¹ Luke 22:51.

⁵⁸² English Standard Version.

⁵⁸³ “...he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword.” (King James Version)

⁵⁸⁴ Luke 19:27. (English Standard Version).

⁵⁸⁵ See Luke 19:21-22.

⁵⁸⁶ “And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, ‘Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?’ But he turned and rebuked them.” (English Standard Version).

⁵⁸⁷ *Against the Jews*.

⁵⁸⁸ John Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, “Homily I, sec. II., (6),” trans. anonymous, accessed November 27, 2013, http://www.preteristarchive.com/ChurchHistory/0386_chrysostom_adversus-judeaus.html.

apparent in contemporaries like St. Augustine, who makes reference to Jesus's command to "compel (ἀνάγκασον / nötige) them to come in" in another parable (Luke 14:23), in addition to the expected instances of Old Testament authoritarianism.⁵⁸⁹

The overall impression one gets of the situation is that Wagner has difficulty reconciling Jesus's conflicting positions on violence and non-violence. This may not be so much a result of inconsistency on Wagner's own behalf than as the result of the tensions inherent in his source material; hence his use of selective quotation and omission. However, while the standard theological means of reconciling these contradictions has been to locate retribution in the coming heavenly judgment, Wagner makes little attempt to dissociate the necessity of "the sword" from the present revolutionary moment.

Wagner also cites the well-known maxim from Matthew, that

no man mendeth an old garment with a patch of new cloth, for the patch teareth away from the garment again and the rent is made worse. Neither do men put new wine into old wine-skins, else the skins do burst and the wine is spilt and the skins are ruined; but put new wine into new wine-skins, the two will hold with one another.⁵⁹⁰

It is difficult not to see the revolutionary overtones that Wagner is implying with this passage: an insistence that the society of the liberated man must likewise be created *de novo*, rather than evolutionarily, and a rejection of reform through existing societal constraints in favor of revolution. However, the original context of the passage is actually a discussion about fasting, not of the necessity of revolution over reform. Nevertheless, it does explain why the old order (the Pharisees) cannot partake of Jesus's ministry until after his departure. Crucially, however,

⁵⁸⁹ E.g., Augustine cites Proverbs 23:14, "Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell," in Augustine of Hippo, "Letters of St. Augustine of Hippo," trans. J.G. Cunningham, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, vol. 1, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), letter to Donatus, AD 416, no. 173, secs. 3 and 10, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102.htm>.

⁵⁹⁰ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 333-334; Matthew 9:16-17.

Wagner does not cite the version of this parable from Luke, which concludes that “no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, ‘The old is better.’”⁵⁹¹ Wagner certainly would not want to imply the preferability of reaction over revolution, but it appears that Jesus’s here is simply expressing the difficulty that his message faces among those who have been inured to it by the ways of the world. Of course, Wagner would not take kindly to a similar implication of a lack of convicting power of his own works.

Theoretical Section

The middle, theoretical section of *Jesus von Nazareth* is also the least amenable to analysis. It cannot be checked against established sources (i.e., the Bible) like the rest of the work. It is instead entirely the product of Wagner’s imagination, though heavily salted with Feuerbachian ideas. In form it frankly resembles a stream of consciousness discursus. Referring to this section, translator William Ashton Ellis accurately comments that “in any case, it can never have been intended to adopt the whole of this voluminous material into a spoken drama”⁵⁹² and further, that he cannot imagine Wagner as “having meant the longer disquisitions in Part II of *Jesus of Nazareth* as actual speeches to be delivered by the principal personage, yet they cannot but be regarded as scaffolding for the dialogue; and the idea of setting these Feuerbachian hermeneutics to music must be rejected as at once incredible.”⁵⁹³ Wagner’s concerns here prefigure many of the same emphases that he puts forth in his scriptural citations.

⁵⁹¹ Luke 5:39. (New International Version).

⁵⁹² Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 284.

⁵⁹³ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth and other Writings*, xvi.

Chapter 6: Wagner's Subsequent Christology: A Summation

“Mein Reich ist nicht von dieser Welt.”⁵⁹⁴

Wagner's Retrospective Thoughts on *Jesus von Nazareth*

Wagner gives *Jesus von Nazareth* a fairly extended discussion in his 1851 *Eine Mittheilung an meine Freunde*;⁵⁹⁵ however, his language is here obscure as well, and matters are rather more muddled than clarified. Wagner was already by this point moving beyond his previous Feuerbachian ethos of the *Jesus von Nazareth* period, and his description of his purposes therein seems to have changed from his intentions at the time he drafted it. In any event, Wagner, despairing that his *Siegfried* would ever be performed given the current public climate, found instead that

the force of my desire had borne me to the fount of the Eternal Human: so now, when I found this desire cut off by Modern Life from all appeasement, and saw afresh that the sole redemption lay in flight from out this life, in casting-off its claims on me by self-destruction, did I come to the fount of every modern rendering of such a situation—to *Jesus of Nazareth* the Man.⁵⁹⁶

While it would not be appropriate to consider Jesus as a sort of Christian Siegfried, Wagner did recognize the universality of his subject. He then arrived at a realization “particularly resultful for the Artist:” that of the difference between “the symbolical Christ and *Him* who, thought-of as existing at a certain time and amid definite surroundings, presents so easily embraced an image

⁵⁹⁴ John 18:36; “ἡ βασιλεία ἡ ἐμὴ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου.” The verse occurs in the context of Jesus’s questioning by Pontius Pilate, and serves as part of Jesus’s denial of kingship, with the rationale that his followers would have resisted his arrest and fought on his behalf had his kingdom been worldly. Jesus goes on to assert that the purpose of his birth is to testify to the truth (“ἵνα μαρτυρήσω τῇ ἀληθείᾳ”) rather than to be a king (John 18:37).

⁵⁹⁵ *A Communication to my Friends*. Wagner uses the spelling “Mittheilung,” which in modern German orthography would be rendered “Mitteilung.” See Richard Wagner, *A Communication to my Friends*, in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, vol. 1, 269-392, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1895), accessed November 27, 2013, <http://users.belgacom.net/wagnerlibrary/prose/wagcomm.htm>.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 378.

to our hearts and minds.”⁵⁹⁷ This later conception was essentially the impulse to make Jesus a dramatically productive figure by humanizing him in the context of his historical particularity. Jesus, who was “so loving and so love-thirsty a soul,” found himself arrayed against “a materialism (*Sinnlichkeit*) so honourless, so hollow, and so pitiful as that of the Roman world” which he was powerless to transform, and instead sought after “a better land Beyond,—toward Death.”⁵⁹⁸ This is the same dilemma facing modern man, a

truth deep-rooted in man's sentient nature, which yearns from out an evil and dishonoured world-of-sense (*Sinnlichkeit*) towards a nobler reality (*Wahrnehmbarkeit*) that shall answer to his nature purified. Here Death is but the moment of despair; it is the act of demolition that we discharge upon ourselves, since—as solitary units—we can not discharge it on the evil order of the tyrant world. But the actual destruction of the outer, visible bonds of that honourless materialism, is the duty which devolves on *us*, as the healthy proclamation of a stress turned heretofore toward self-destruction.⁵⁹⁹

Wagner thus sought to portray Jesus

in such a fashion that his self-offering should be the but imperfect utterance of that human instinct which drives the individual into revolt against a loveless whole, into a revolt which the altogether Isolated can certainly only seal by self-destruction; but yet which in this very self-destruction proclaims its own true nature, in that it was not directed to the personal death, but to a disowning of the lovelessness around (*der lieblosen Allgemeinheit*).⁶⁰⁰

It is immediately apparent that this conception of a merely symbolic protest against materialism and lovelessness does not square with the spirit of the work. Ashton Ellis insightfully editorializes to this effect in a footnote:

It appears that, by opposing the terms *Sinnlichkeit* and *Wahrnehmbarkeit*, our author here seeks to draw a distinction between the faculties of the lower and the higher senses, and thus between the objects on which these faculties must be exercised. It is perhaps unnecessary to point out how intrinsically this passage differs from the views of Feuerbach and his circle, and how it already foreshadows the transcendentalism of Wagner's later period, as developed in the *Beethoven* essay, *Religion and Art*, and *Parsifal*.⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., 379.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid., 379-380.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

Wagner's description of *Jesus von Nazareth* in the *Mittheilung* is thus at best reflective of a change of heart already underway, or at worst of a retrospective whitewash. Wagner in any event declares that he abandoned *Jesus von Nazareth* due to both the contradictory nature of its subject matter and his recognized impossibility of it ever being performed. The latter difficulty was attributable to the necessity of a revolution in order to see the work produced; paradoxically, though, *Jesus von Nazareth* could only have had a dramatic impact under the "modern life-conditions ... *precisely now* before the Folk, and not *hereafter*," as "these same conditions should have been demolished by that very Revolution" which would provide "the only possibility of publicly producing to the Folk this drama."⁶⁰² The internal problem with the actual content of *Jesus von Nazareth* derived from the heavy-handedness which would be required to convey Wagner's own ideas in the guise of a well-recognized pre-existing mythos:

The story, such as it has stamped itself once and for all on the mind of the Folk, through religious dogma and popular conception, must be done too grievous a violence, if I fain would give therein my modern reading of its nature; its popular features must be touched, and altered with a deliberation more philosophic than artistic, in order to insensibly withdraw them from the customary point of view and show them in the light that I had seen them in.⁶⁰³

Thankfully, Wagner was thus at least cognizant of the inherent shortcomings of *Jesus von Nazareth*, and was in the future able to confine his more directly philosophical and ideological bent to his occasionally tendentious theoretical essays, while infusing his future music dramas with a subtlety grounded in such theory but without it being displayed in such a browbeatingly overt manner as to be diegetically disruptive.

Wagner does foreshadow his future *Weltanschauung* at some points in *Jesus von Nazareth*. In an emphasized passage, Wagner cites Luke 17:20-21, in which the Pharisees

⁶⁰² Ibid., 380.

⁶⁰³ Ibid.

question Jesus on when the kingdom of God will come. Jesus replies, “*The kingdom of God cometh not with outward tokens* (παρατηρήσεως / äußerlichen Gebärden). *Neither shall they say, Lo here! or Lo there! For behold, the kingdom of God is inward within you* (ἐντὸς ὑμῶν / inwendig in euch).”⁶⁰⁴ The Greek “παρατήρησις” (in the nominative) implies that which is carefully guarded or watched, and thus is visibly seen. The kingdom, then, is unseen. Both the German and the Greek preserve the second person plural, which means a shared kingdom of God amongst multiple people – “within you *all*.” “ἐντὸς” is a preposition of disputed meaning, variously translated as “within,” “inside,” “in the midst,” or “among.” Indeed, the entire verse is the subject of theological debate.⁶⁰⁵ Luther’s “inwendig in” seems to unambiguously argue for “inside,” which also is the apparent majority scholarly opinion, particularly when contrasted with the antonym “ἐκτός.”⁶⁰⁶ Among those who argue for “in the midst,” the understanding is that the kingdom of God, as a physical place, cannot possibly be interiorly located, and specifically not within the sinful Pharisees. However, this means that a kingdom of God must be externally among us and yet still unseen (“οὐκ ... μετὰ παρατηρήσεως”). Such a conception bears a resemblance to the fundamental (and heretical) Gnostic doctrine of the necessary accessibility of otherwise hidden knowledge to the gnostically enlightened. Since, as will be seen, Wagner’s own doctrines share some characteristics with certain aspects of Gnosticism, one could argue that the Wagner of *Jesus von Nazareth* might view the kingdom of God as in this manner externally distributed and requiring a revolutionary gnosis to be immanently achieved. But given Wagner’s

⁶⁰⁴ Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 335.

⁶⁰⁵ See Kerry A. Shirts, “ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἐντὸς ὑμῶν ἐστίν – ‘The Kingdom of God is Within You’ What Does Luke 17:21 Mean?”, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.backyardprofessor.com/>, and Michael Marlowe, “The Kingdom of God Is Within You,” accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.bible-researcher.com/luke17.21.html>.

⁶⁰⁶ However, the meanings of ἐκτός are themselves variable and debated.

reliance on Luther's rather clear, internalizing translation, this is a somewhat speculative conclusion. Wagner may thus have arrived at a hybrid conception, that the kingdom of God, when internalized by the many, is consequently externally manifested through the spiritual unity thereby created. This would especially be the case if one is to take his analysis in the *Mittheilung* at face value.

In any event, Jesus's response ignores the Pharisees' temporal query by stating that the kingdom of God is, in the explicit present tense, currently manifest, regardless of its specific location. Jesus changes the terms of the debate from the timing of the kingdom's arrival to the nature of its presence. This is the same sort of metaphorical change of mentality that Wagner himself would undergo. The post-*Jesus of Nazareth* Schopenhauerian Wagner would eschew this immanent conception of the presence of the kingdom of God in favor of Jesus's Johannine assertion that "my kingdom is not of this world."

Schopenhauer and the Transcendental Turn

"My kingdom is not of this world:" this oft-repeated refrain of Wagner perhaps most succinctly summarizes his perspective on Jesus in the second half of his life, subsequent to the drafting of *Jesus von Nazareth*. Wagner's Jesus would increasingly come to be a spiritual rather than political figure, a mystic rather than a revolutionary. This was a process that mirrored Wagner's own development, particularly after encountering Schopenhauer, though, as always with Wagner, this was subject to numerous contradictions. In much the same way, Wagner self-identified with the concept of otherworldliness and saw contemporary incomprehension and dismissal of his own ideas and music as a sort of confirmatory "sign of contradiction," of the

same sort that it is predicted the child Jesus will encounter in Luke 2:34.⁶⁰⁷ In his 1878 essay “Das Publikum in Zeit und Raum,”⁶⁰⁸ Wagner looks at the relationship between “the artistically and poetically productive individual” and the circumstances of his temporal and locative public, and attempts to explain “why, the more considerable that individual, in the greater contradiction has he stood with his time.”⁶⁰⁹ Wagner’s thinking in this regard is largely antithetical to the Hegelian notion of the *Zeitgeist*,⁶¹⁰ as, for Wagner, those who would transcend vulgarity must essentially swim against the current of the public.⁶¹¹ The “sublimest of all examples,” is, of course, found in the fact that “the cotemporary [sic] world most certainly did not comport itself toward Jesus Christ as though it had nursed him at its breast and delighted in acknowledging him its fittest product.”⁶¹²

Wagner first encountered the works of Arthur Schopenhauer in 1854, and his entire way of thinking was immediately and irrevocably thenceforth radically reoriented. In fact, other than Wagner’s anti-Semitism, the impact of Schopenhauer on Wagner is the most heavily studied aspect of the composer’s work. Owing to this fact, Schopenhauer and the rest of Wagner’s post-revolutionary outlook will be examined here primarily only in the context of Wagner’s

⁶⁰⁷ There described as a “σημείον ἀντιλεγόμενον.”

⁶⁰⁸ “The Public in Time and Space.” See Richard Wagner, “The Public in Time and Space,” in *Richard Wagner’s Prose Works*, vol. 6, 85-94, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1897), accessed November 27, 2013, <http://users.belgacom.net/wagnerlibrary/prose/wlpr0138.htm>. Cf. the statement of Wagner’s Gurnemanz in Act I of *Parsifal*, “...zum Raum wird hier die Zeit,” or “...here time becomes space.” Richard Wagner, *Parsifal in Full Score* (New York: Dover Publications, 1986), 144.

⁶⁰⁹ Wagner, “The Public in Time and Space,” 85.

⁶¹⁰ Hegel in fact uses the phrase “Spirit of his Time (*Geist seiner Zeit*),” to which all are attached; “none remains behind it, still less advances beyond it (Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, “III. Philosophic History, ii. The Essential Destiny of Reason, (3) The Embodiment Spirit Assumes – the State § 57.”

⁶¹¹ Wagner, “The Public in Time and Space,” 94.

⁶¹² *Ibid.*, 85.

Christology. In brief, Schopenhauer, claiming to have taken the philosophy of Kant to its logical conclusion, essentially independently re-invented many of the core doctrines of Buddhist thought in a rationalistic context.⁶¹³ Schopenhauer contends that there is a single undifferentiated force underlying all of existence, which he calls the Will (*Wille*). Schopenhauer's *Wille* is an unknowable primal force which we perceive only indirectly as mere Representation (*Vorstellung*). Thus the kernel of the truth of existence becomes unreachably transcendental instead of omnipresently immanent, as Wagner had previously supposed from his Hegelian studies. Moreover, Schopenhauer despised Hegel and positioned his philosophy as a direct repudiation of Hegel's own thinking, a contrast which in Wagner's case makes the composer's philosophical volte-face all the more abrupt.⁶¹⁴ Since all living beings and, in fact, every component of our consciously perceived universe, are comprised of this selfsame, underlying *Wille*, which, moreover, we can never truly access, all of life consists of meaningless conflict, with the *Wille* continually consuming itself. Schopenhauer himself drew a quite pessimistic conclusion from this state of affairs, and in fact eventually became a night-recluse, though he did propose that since the suffering of one being is actually, through the connection of the *Wille*, the suffering of all, the most appropriate ethical stance is that of *Mitleid*, or compassion. The concept of *Mitleid* would become decisive in all of Wagner's mature works.

⁶¹³ For a further details of Schopenhauer's philosophy, see Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, and Magee, 152-173, particularly for its impact on Wagner.

⁶¹⁴ Schopenhauer in fact held Hegel in such contempt that he deliberately scheduled his university lectures in Berlin in the summer of 1820 during the same time of day as Hegel's own lectures. Schopenhauer consequently attracted almost no students in comparison to the dialectician, further embittering him. (David E. Cartwright, *Schopenhauer: A Biography* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010], 365.) Schopenhauer in various places derides Hegel as "monsieur-know-nothing" (qtd. in *ibid.*, 364) and "that intellectual Caliban." (Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, xxi).

Wagner's 1870 *Beethoven* essay shows both the extent and limitations of his changed mentality. In describing the degenerative forces at work in modern art, Wagner primarily blames the dominant sensibility of *Mode*, or fashion, which has severely hampered the possibility of artistic originality. While the hegemony of *Mode* is bound up in the historical development of culture itself, "twere thinkable that these consequences might be blotted out, namely in the foundering of our civilisation; an event to be conceived if all History went by the board as a result, let us say, of social Communism imposing itself on the modern world in the guise of a practical religion."⁶¹⁵ It is unclear what communism in "practical" religious garb would resemble. It is further uncertain whether Wagner is here advocating for such a revolutionary outcome, warning against it, or merely engaging in dispassionate speculation. According to Shaw, this outburst represents merely a "destructive urge" that Wagner had "learned to resist."⁶¹⁶ Indeed, Wagner proceeds to rhapsodize instead on the internal and essential redemptive power of music to overcome this state of affairs, with Christianity as his comparative metaphor:

But coevally with this world of Mode another world has risen for us. As Christianity stepped forth amid the Roman civilisation of the universe, so *Music* breaks forth from the chaos of modern civilisation. Both say aloud: "our kingdom is not of this world." And that means: we come from within, ye from without; we spring from the Essence of things, ye from their Show.⁶¹⁷

"Essence" and "Show" ("Wesen" and "Scheine")⁶¹⁸ are clearly references to Schopenhauer's contrasting categories of the *Wille* and *Vorstellung*.

⁶¹⁵ Wagner, *Beethoven* (1896), 120. For original German version, see Richard Wagner, *Beethoven* (Leipzig : E. W. Fritsch, 1870), 66, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008718323>. "Es wäre denkbar, daß diese Konsequenzen sich abstumpfen, nämlich im Untergange unsrer Civilisation; was ungefähr anzunehmen wäre, wenn alle Geschichte über den Haufen geworfen würde, wie dieß etwa in den Konsequenzen des sozialen Kommunismus liegen müßte, wenn dieser sich der modernen Welt im Sinne einer praktischen Religion bemächtigen sollte."

⁶¹⁶ Shaw, 43.

⁶¹⁷ Wagner, *Beethoven* (1896), 120.

⁶¹⁸ Wagner, *Beethoven* (1870), 67. "Scheine" is actually the plural of *Schein*, meaning literally "shine."

Schopenhauer's aesthetics also make themselves plainly apparent here. Unlike Hegel, for whom music played second fiddle to "the most perfect art" of poetry,⁶¹⁹ Schopenhauer elevated music to the pinnacle of artistic expression, largely because he saw in its emotive abstraction the ability to bypass mere appearances and to obtain a direct connection to the *Ding an sich*⁶²⁰ of the *Wille*.⁶²¹ For Schopenhauer, music grants access to the universal in that it "does not express this or that particular or definite pleasure, this or that affliction, pain, sorrow, horror, gaiety, merriment, or peace of mind, but joy, pain, sorrow, horror, gaiety, merriment, peace of mind *themselves*, to a certain extent in the abstract, their essential nature, without accessories."⁶²² Schopenhauer's appeal to Wagner in his formulation of the metaphysicality of music should be obvious, as is Wagner's distinction between "essence" and "show." The mature Wagner, in contrast to the spirit of *Jesus von Nazareth*, would therefore come to identify both music and Christianity as proceeding transcendently, and thus "not of this world." It is worth pointing out that Wagner in effect saw the world-denial of Christianity *contra* the Roman ethos of pagan violence of as analogous to his own music's denial of the chaos of the modern present. One should raise the caveat, however, that Schopenhauer specifically affirms "absolute" music, which is non-textual and non-narrative, as most purely conveying the *Wille*, since, by his reasoning, it only "occurs in time, but does not involve any of the other cognitive conditions on

⁶¹⁹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophie der Kunst oder Ästhetik. Nach Hegel. Im Sommer 1826. Mitschrift Friedrich Carl Hermann Victor von Kehler*, ed. A. Gethmann-Siefert and B. Collenberg-Plotnikov (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2004), 197.

⁶²⁰ "Thing-in-itself." Schopenhauer maintained Kant's terminology of the noumenal *Ding an sich*, though it is entirely undifferentiated in the form of the *Wille*.

⁶²¹ Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 261-264.

⁶²² *Ibid.*, 261.

experience.”⁶²³ Wagner wrote little of such music, and his operas, to speak nothing of his *Gesamtkunstwerk* ideal, are the diametrical opposite of absolute music. Similarly, though Hegel assigns dramatic poetry, and (like Wagner) specifically Greek drama to the highest rung of the aesthetic ladder, Houlgate points out that Hegel would not likely have approved of Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*, since, although drama itself contains the other arts,⁶²⁴ opera is primarily a musical rather than dramatic experience, and the concept of “music drama” therefore represents the confusion of distinct art forms.⁶²⁵

There are some overlapping congruencies in the conclusions arrived at by Feuerbach and Schopenhauer, though their reasons for so concluding were unrelated. Namely, both men attached high-supreme significance to the metaphysical role of love. Schopenhauer’s view thereof is in fact also remarkably similar to the description of love found within a rhapsodical and mystical meditation on its nature in Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*: “God is behind everything, but everything hides God. Things are black, creatures are opaque. To love a being is to render that being transparent.”⁶²⁶ Though this represents a theicized perspective where Schopenhauer’s is essentially atheistic, it does nicely convey Schopenhauer’s (and the Schopenhauerian Wagner’s) view as love in its dual capacity of, on the one hand, essentially and

⁶²³ Sandra Shapshay, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Summer 2012 Edition, ed. Edward N. Zalta, s.v. “Schopenhauer’s Aesthetics, 5.2.5 Music,” accessed November 27, 2013, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2012/entries/schopenhauer-aesthetics>.

⁶²⁴ Hegel, *Philosophie der Kunst oder Ästhetik*, 223.

⁶²⁵ Stephen Houlgate, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Summer 2010 Edition, ed. Edward N. Zalta, s.v. “Hegel’s Aesthetics, 6.3.5.2 Dramatic Poetry,” accessed November 27, 2013, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2010/entries/hegel-aesthetics>.

⁶²⁶ Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, trans. Isabel F. Hapgood, “Volume IV, Book Fifth, Chapter IV, A Heart beneath a Stone,” accessed November 27, 2013, http://www.online-literature.com/victor_hugo/les_miserables/.

critically undergirding the substrate of the noumenon and, on the other, as a sort of gate through which access to the noumenal *Wille* is thereby achieved.

Gfrörer and Renan

Wagner read August Friedrich Gfrörer's *Geschichte des Urchristentums* in 1874-1875. Wagner had, in fact, described Gfrörer as "the most sensitive of writers in the handling of religious matters," even placing him above Ernest Renan.⁶²⁷ This is a somewhat surprising assessment given Gfrörer's affirmation of the strong historical kinship between Judaism and Christianity, especially when contrasted with Wagner's and Renan's shared anti-Semitism.⁶²⁸ Nevertheless, in examining Wagner's Johannine affinities, we have already seen that Wagner both was influenced by Gfrörer's work and likewise found confirmation of his own previously-held beliefs therein. Gfrörer was disturbed by the way modern criticism of the Bible had undermined Christian faith and sought to use the same critical methods of its detractors to instead buttress it. His Christological perspective, like Wagner's, emphasized the humanity of Christ:

I understand God's son not as the metaphysical essence that traditional dogmatism teaches us lies far away from human experience, but rather I use this term to describe the ethical and spiritual perfection through which Christ distinguished Himself from other human beings.⁶²⁹

⁶²⁷ Qtd. in Brener, 243.

⁶²⁸ This work, with its investigation of the foundational influences of Christianity, ironically gave occasion for Wagner to learn something of Jewish mysticism and Kabbala.

⁶²⁹ Qtd. in Ulrike Kienzle, "Parsifal and Religion: A Christian Music Drama?" in *A Companion to Wagner's Parsifal*, ed. William Kinderman and Katherine Rae Syer (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005), 110. Kienzle includes the original German version: "Ich verstehe unter Gottes Sohn nicht das metaphysische, menschlicher Erfahrung ferne liegende Wesen der hergebrachten Dogmatik, sondern ich bezeichne damit die sittliche und geistige Vollkommenheit, durch welche sich Christus von anderen Menschen unterscheidet."

Wagner also became acquainted with the French author Ernest Renan around this time, primarily through Renan's *Vie de Jésus*,⁶³⁰ his own best-selling retelling of the life of Jesus. Renan shared Wagner's estimation of Jesus as altogether distinct from and superior to the Jews, as well as his general anti-Semitism.⁶³¹ The *Vie de Jésus* also mirrors Wagner's prior concern with presenting a humanistic and non-miraculous Jesus, as well as his esteem for the Gospel of John.

Religion und Kunst

Wagner's *Religion und Kunst*, written late in his life, falls into the group of writings known as Wagner's "regeneration essays."⁶³² By his usual standards, Wagner manages to keep his anti-Semitism relatively constrained in *Religion und Kunst*, as it does not constitute the main thrust of his argument. Disparagement of Judaism does, however, manifest itself in places, as we would no doubt expect in a Wagnerian discussion of religion. The overall tenor of the essay, with its emphasis on the sacrificial example of Christ, derives one component of its rhetorical force from its contrast of this New Covenant with that of the Hebraic Old. Regarding the symbolic power of Christ's suffering, which inspired "the reversal of the will to live" among believers, we read of the Church founded thereupon, that

⁶³⁰ *Life of Jesus*. See Ernest Renan, *The Life of Jesus*, intro. John Haynes Holmes, trans. anonymous, (New York: The Modern Library, 1927).

⁶³¹ Renan, among other theories, was the first to propose that Europe's Ashkenazi Jewish population had descended from remnants of the medieval Turkic Khazar Khaganate (whose rulers had converted to Judaism) rather than from the traditional post-Roman diaspora, thus contributing to the anti-Semitic conception of "Asiatic" Judaism.

⁶³² Wagner followed *Religion und Kunst* with several shorter appendiceal essays. Notable among them is *Heldenthum und Christenthum (Hero-dom and Christendom)*, which further speculates on the possibility of Jesus's alleged "Aryan" ancestry. This position was in part influenced by Wagner's reading of the racialist theories of the Comte de Gobineau.

what was bound to prove her ruin, and lead at last to the ever louder 'Atheism' of our day, was the tyrant-prompted thought of tracing back this Godliness upon the cross to the Jewish 'Creator of heaven and earth,' a wrathful God of Punishment who seemed to promise greater power than the self-offering, all-loving Saviour of the Poor.⁶³³

It should of course be noted that such a conception of theological error assigns blame primarily to the Church itself in its seeking after temporal authority, and implicates Judaism only in its happenstance providence of a convenient and pre-existing undergirding thereof.

Wagner therefore sees the Gods of Judaism and Christianity as distinct and opposed entities, who, in his opinion, became lamentably fused. Continuing in this vein, Wagner describes how this former "tribal God of a petty nation had promised his people eventual rulership of the whole world and all that lives and moves therein," conditioned on adherence to a segregating Law.⁶³⁴ Such a mentality then became "the requisite bugbear" that enabled the emerging Christian church to subject "the decaying races" of the ancient world to "terror;" that is, it adopted compulsion as its means of enforcing the originally anti-compulsive message of Jesus, instead of allowing the force of conviction of the Gospel to stand for itself.⁶³⁵ The Church's movement in this direction ironically sprang from the stark contrast that Jesus's example of peaceful denial of the Will presented to man's natural impulse toward the Will to live; "called to upheave a State built upon violence and rapine, the Church must deem her surest means the attainment of dominion over states and empires, in accordance with all the spirit of History."⁶³⁶

⁶³³ Wagner, *Religion and Art*, 217.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*

Wagner identifies this inversion of Christ's message as born out symbolically in future historical Christian violence, though his evidence is of the vaguest and most general sort. "Wherever Christian hosts fared forth to robbery and bloodshed, even beneath the banner of the Cross it was not the All-Sufferer whose name was invoked, but *Moses, Joshua, Gideon*, and all the other captains of Jehova who had fought for the people of Israel."⁶³⁷ Similarly, while armies of the present day ostensibly invoke Jesus, "they can but mean Jehova, Jahve [Yahweh], or one of the Elohim, who hated all other gods beside himself, and wished them subjugated by his faithful people."⁶³⁸

The Constantinian shift in Christianity, whereby the religion underwent a fundamental change in outlook as it transitioned from a persecuted, radical faith to an established state church, is a well-attested historical phenomenon. Kierkegaard, for example, had found such a struggle to be an inherent and ongoing battle for every believer, couched under the rubric of the faith of the individual Christian versus the social structure of "Christendom."⁶³⁹ Indeed, we find in Cosima's diaries the following thoughts after reading Gibbon:

R. agrees with me when I say that it seems likely that Constantine embraced Christianity in order to rejuvenate the crumbling Roman world with new strength and to salvage the Roman idea of world domination after the disappearance of Roman personalities. All of it politics, as right up to the present day, which is also why they (the priests) cannot give up their thought of world dominion.⁶⁴⁰

Wagner does not comment on the specific political circumstances of this shift, as they are indeed outside his purview, but as we have seen, he instead identifies the grafting of the New Testament

⁶³⁷ Ibid., 233.

⁶³⁸ Ibid., 233-234.

⁶³⁹ See, e.g., articles in *Fædrelandet*, December 1854 – May 1855, cited in D. Anthony Storm, "Sixth Period: The Attack Upon Christendom (1854-55), Articles From *The Fatherland*," accessed November 27, 2013, <http://sorenkierkegaard.org/articles-from-fatherland.html>.

⁶⁴⁰ Cosima Wagner, vol. 1, entry of Tuesday, July 2, 1872, 507.

onto the Old as in both a determinant and an outcome of Christianity-as-Lordship, to his dismay. This corollary of Wagner's is by no means an innovation either, but its implications are important in assessing his view of redemption. In *Religion und Kunst*, at least, Wagner cannot countenance Christ's redemption as originating in and encompassing Judaism, but rather as the redemption of man *from* Judaism. Wagner's pessimistically degenerative outlook on humanity, and by extension his view of the degenerative course of the Christian symbol in art, springs mainly from his aforementioned conception of ceaseless violence inspired by carnivorousness; Jewish influence in Christianity is merely one facet of the process of Christianity's theological inauthenticity and therefore also of Wagner's assessment of its present artistic bankruptcy.

Wagner's rhetoric here does take on something of an eliminationist tinge – though it should be stressed that this takes the form of a hypothetical historical fantasy rather than an outright call for destructive anti-Semitic action. He relates that the self-imposed segregation of the Jews caused them to be “despised and hated equally by every race,” and therefore possessing only a tenuous hold on their own continued existence. Further,

without inherent productivity and only battenning on the general downfall, in the course of violent revolutions this folk would very probably have been extinguished as completely as the greatest and noblest stems before them; Islam in particular seemed called to carry out the work of total extirpation, for it took to itself the Jewish God, as Creator of heaven and earth, to raise him up by fire and sword as one and only god of all that breathes.⁶⁴¹

Wagner biographer Joachim Köhler gives some perspective on the level of hypocrisy to be found in squaring the idealism of Wagner's regeneration essays against the reality of his life: “Wagner liked his half bottle of champagne too much to give it up. In spite of his horror of slaughterhouses, he refused to stop eating steak.”⁶⁴² Wagner's actual faith-based commitment to

⁶⁴¹ Wagner, *Religion and Art*, 232.

⁶⁴² Köhler, 559.

Christianity also comes under review. As previously discussed, the strength and validity of religion can be diminished when reduced to allegoric symbolism from believing and living practice. Köhler quotes Wagner as promising to “set the Christian religious holidays to music – they’ll be my symphonies,” apparently insincerely, much to Cosima’s chagrin.⁶⁴³ Wagner’s ostensibly intended post-*Parsifal* symphonic output was indeed a mirage. Though of course these works never materialized primarily due to his death soon after *Parsifal*’s composition, one can speculate that once Wagner had mined Christianity dry in constructing his grand spiritual concluding statement in *Parsifal*, he had little use or indeed motivation for further musical treatment of Christianity on its terms, rather than on his own. After all, Wagner’s music is nothing if not an imposition of his will on the audience, and that to an extent much greater than in other composers.

Köhler goes on to surmise that “the true meaning of the essays of Wagner’s old age lies in their attempt to reconcile the contradictions not within the world at large but within Wagner’s own life.”⁶⁴⁴ For Köhler, Wagner’s inner contradiction sprang from the loss of individuality occasioned by his marriage to Cosima. Wagner’s hypocritical behaviors, and indeed even the startling array of somatic symptoms from his multitudinous physical ailments, were a sort of passive-aggressive revolt against curtailed individuation.

If true, the irony of Köhler’s hypothesis cannot be understated when one considers the supreme importance which the Wagner of *Jesus von Nazareth* vintage placed on the power of true love in human relations. His relationship with Cosima was ostensibly a celebration of just that spirit of uninhibited love, given its entirely open and assertive nature even while Cosima was

⁶⁴³ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid.

still married to her first husband, the pianist and conductor Hans von Bülow. The extent of this “liberation” is readily apparent when one considers that while they were still married, von Bülow was rehearsing the ultimately cancelled Viennese premier of Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* while being fully aware that Cosima was simultaneously pregnant with Wagner’s son Siegfried. That Wagner himself would ultimately feel constrained after actually marrying Cosima is thus a personal strike against his theoretical embrace of “true” love. Such a conclusion is also certainly borne out by the numerous affairs which diminished both of Wagner’s marriages. One is led to believe that his insistence that liberated love be at the center of human affairs was ultimately a largely self-serving rationalization.

Wagner’s Letters

One other source of Wagner’s later Christological outlook is his letters, of which many more are extant from this period than from his time in Dresden, in part due to his ongoing necessity to correspond rather than converse in person, since he remained a political fugitive in much of Germany. Wagner’s friend Malwida von Meysenburg was the recipient of this missive which reaffirms not only Wagner’s lifelong contrast of Christ with the Jews, but also his post-*Jesus von Nazareth* conception of Christ as a philosophically-renunciatory rather than politically-revolutionary figure:

My dearest Malwida, this much is certain, that the myth of a Messiah is the most profoundly characteristic of all myths for all our earthly striving. The Jews expected someone who would liberate them, a Messiah who was supposed to restore the kingdom of David and bring not only justice but, more especially, greatness, power, and safety from oppression. Well, everything went as predicted, his birth in Bethlehem, of the line of David, the prophecy of the three wise men, etc., his triumphant welcome to Jerusalem, palms strewn before him, etc. – there he stood, everyone listened, and he proclaimed to them: ‘My kingdom is not of this world! Renounce your desires, that is the only way to be redeemed and freed!’ – Believe me, all our political freedom fighters strike me as being uncannily like the Jews.⁶⁴⁵

⁶⁴⁵ Wagner, *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, letter to Malwida von Meysenburg of June 15, 1862, no. 279, 546.

In another letter to his associate Hans von Wolzogen, who had become what amounted to Wagner's court propagandist in his role as editor of Wagner's literary-political journal, the *Bayreuther Blätter*, Wagner expresses many of the same themes as above, but goes so far as to attempt to separate Christ from Christianity itself:

I am almost afraid that we shall have difficulty in reaching an understanding with our friends and patrons on the future meaning and significance of the incomparably and sublimely simple and true redeemer who appears to us in the historically intelligible figure of Jesus of Nazareth, but who must first be cleansed and redeemed of the distortion that has been caused by Alexandrine, Judaic, and Roman despotism. Nevertheless, although we are merciless in abandoning the Church and the priesthood and, indeed, the whole historical phenomenon of Christianity, our friends must always know that we do so for the sake of that same Christ, whom – because of His utter incomparability and recognizability – we wish to preserve in His total purity, so that – like all other sublime products of man's artistic and scientific spirit – we can take Him with us into those terrible times which may very well follow the necessary destruction of all that at present exists. –
In other words, what we are happy to abandon to the most pitiless destruction is all that impairs and distorts this saviour of ours: that is why we ask for sensitivity and care in the way we express ourselves, lest we end up working with the Jews and for the Jews.⁶⁴⁶

Wagner here appears to desire to replace Christianity with what could be called “Jesuisism” – that is, the adherence to the teachings of Jesus himself and opposition to institutional Christianity. Wagner comes off as short-sighted and even arrogant in this regard. Every Christian denomination has, after all, thought of itself as adhering most closely to the teachings of Christ in their purest form – and what should make Wagner any different? What gives him special access to the mystical truth at the center of religious experience, other than his own overweening vainglory? On the other hand, there is some validity to the point of view that one can attempt to emulate Jesus from a philosopho-ethical perspective, be it theistic or not.

We see here also in Wagner's desire for the “necessary destruction of all that at present exists” a recurring motif in his thought – that the extent of corruption of society as it is requires a clean sweep in order for any improvement to be accomplished. Here again Wagner did not cease

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., letter to Hans von Wolzogen of January 17, 1880, no. 475, 898-899.

to be a revolutionary with the expiry of his youth. Wagner's operatic works are themselves shot through with this apocalypticism, most notably the *Ring*. This also brings to mind also one of Wagner's most notorious anti-Semitic outbursts. Cosima reports that after a fire at Vienna's Ringtheater in 1881 in which 900 people perished, most of whom were Jews, Wagner remarked that a new fire should be set at a rebuilt theater with more Jews therein, during a performance of Lessing's tolerance-promoting *Nathan der Weise*, no less.⁶⁴⁷ In studies of Wagner's anti-Semitism, this episode has sometimes been taken to constitute some sort of proto-Holocaust fetishism on Wagner's part. (Wagner's vituperativeness here may possibly be explained as a kind of joke gone wrong, in that *Nathan der Weise* was not infrequently read by Cosima to their children and to guests.)⁶⁴⁸ For our purposes, however, it is enough that it shows the intertwining of Wagner's revolutionary mindset in religious terms and his anti-Semitism. The clean break that Wagner envisioned with "Alexandrine, Judaic, and Roman despotism" was part and parcel of the movement toward the Christ of love in *Jesus von Nazareth* and away from the Judaic God of law in *Religion und Kunst*. That the "Church and the priesthood" would have to be abandoned is obvious based on what we have seen of Wagner's anti-Catholic animus, but Wagner's stark black-and-white outlook ensures that such abandonment must be "merciless" and "pitiless." The needed "care in the way we express ourselves," however, shows that in his mind, Judaism and Christianity are irrevocably and diametrically opposed, to say nothing of the Jews contra Christ himself. That Wagner would be concerned that his opposition to conventional, orthodox

⁶⁴⁷ Leon Botstein, "Wagner and Our Century," in *Music at the Turn of Century*, ed. Joseph Kerman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 176.

⁶⁴⁸ Cf. Cosima Wagner, vol. 1, entry of Friday, January 29, 1875, 822, and entry of Sunday, January 31, 1875, 823. Incidentally, while she found the work to be "very moving," Cosima nevertheless remarked that "truth, paid out like a coin in the monologue of Nathan, reminds one of the businesslike attitude of the Jews toward their God." (Ibid., 822.)

Christianity might be mistaken for what he conceived as Jewish perfidy demonstrates the necessity of his valorization of Jesus himself – who was obviously not embraced by the Jews – as the distinguishing factor.

Die Sieger and Parsifal

Wagner's final opera *Parsifal* is by far his most religious work, but its true meaning is heavily disputed. Perhaps the most straightforward characterization of this music drama is that it makes use of Christian symbolism – primarily the Holy Grail and the Holy Lance (the spear that pierced Christ on the cross) – to convey a predominantly Schopenhaurian or Buddhist message. To this extent it can be thought of as a synthesis of themes from several of Wagner's earlier works, including *Jesus von Nazareth* and *Die Sieger (The Victors)*, the latter of which was another unfinished prose draft which recounts Wagner's retelling of the story of the Buddha, although Wagner himself once characterized *Parsifal* as a highly-intensified version of Act III of his *Tristan und Isolde*, which, in addition to the works' shared themes of a wound which can only be healed through love or compassion, also certainly confirms Wagner's Schopenhaurian intentions in *Parsifal*. Although *Parsifal* mentions God, it does not refer to Jesus by name, but only obliquely hints at Christ in terms of the "savior (Heiland)," the "redeemer (Erlöser)," or just "him," and this is moreover never made explicit. Wagner attempted to elucidate some of *Parsifal*'s obscure symbolism in a letter to his benefactor Ludwig II of Bavaria:

'What is the significance of *Kundry*'s kiss?' – That, my beloved, is a terrible secret! You know, of course, the serpent of Paradise and its tempting promise: 'eritis sicut Deus, scientes bonum et malum.'⁶⁴⁹ Adam and Eve became 'knowing.' They became 'conscious of sin.' The human race had to atone for that consciousness by suffering shame and misery until redeemed by Christ who took upon himself the sin of mankind. My dearest friend, how can I speak of such profound matters except in a simile, by means of a comparison? But only the clairvoyant can say what its

⁶⁴⁹ Genesis 3:5, which Spencer and Millington translate as, "Ye shall be gods, knowing good and evil."

inner meaning may be. Adam – Eve: Christ. How would it be if we were now to add to them: -
'Anfortas – Kundry: Parzival?' But with considerable caution!⁶⁵⁰

In the context of the opera, Kundry is a Mary Magdalene-like figure, doomed to eternal rebirth for mocking Christ on the cross, and had distracted Amfortas (here spelled Anfortas) with a kiss while he was wounded by the opera's antagonist with the Holy Lance. Parsifal (here spelled Parzival) ultimately reunites the Lance and the Grail and heals both Kundry and Amfortas. This raises the question of who indeed the "redeemer" is, as the opera's cryptic closing passages, further discussed below, do not make clear whether this redeemer is Jesus, Parsifal, or even Wagner himself, nor, in fact, who is actually being redeemed. This seems to strongly suggest that Wagner was entirely comfortable with at least implying the existence of a redeemer other than Christ, and even that Christ himself may be in need of redemption.

Parsifal, in addition to being Wagner's final artistic statement, is furthermore his final and likely definitive exploration of the character Jesus. Besides its chronological finality, *Parsifal* also has a better claim to definitiveness in terms of Wagner's artistic and philosophic vision of Jesus by virtue of the mere fact that it is a completed work, unlike the draft state in which *Jesus von Nazareth* was left. Ultimately, *Parsifal* clearly represents the culmination of Wagner's abandonment of the idea of Jesus as a socialist revolutionary which had been so strongly manifested in *Jesus von Nazareth*; he instead becomes an abstract, symbolic, and otherworldly concept on the margins of the drama rather than its humanized tragi-heroic protagonist, hinting at a message of renunciation rather than revolution and at compassion as a more compelling emotion than mere love.

⁶⁵⁰ Wagner, *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, letter to King Ludwig II of Bavaria of September 7, 1865, no. 334, .664. The variant spellings apparent in the referenced characters are explained by the fact that Wagner had not at this point finalized the orthography of the *Parsifal*'s dramatis personæ.

Conclusion

“Dein Reich komme. Dein Wille geschehe auf Erden wie im Himmel.”⁶⁵¹

“If a composer could say what he had to say in words, he would not bother trying to say it in music.”⁶⁵² Gustav Mahler’s paraphrased observation, to the effect that the degree of effort involved in the composition of music relates to the very verbal ineffability of the ideas being expressed, is surely applicable to Wagner’s works, though he himself would have likely denied this claim. Wagner’s own elevation of his operas, nay, “music dramas,” to the status of *Gesamtkunstwerke* implies a role for language as elevating of and complementary to music, particularly as the bulk of Wagner’s non-operatic “absolute” music is generally disregarded. The music, however, inevitably remains the decisive element. While efficacy and applicability of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* concept is thoroughly debatable,⁶⁵³ few would not argue that Wagner would be little-remembered today if not for the power of his music. His purely written works would not have survived the crucible of historical relevance on their own account, absent his musical contributions. Though his writings vary between the genres of theory, drama, and politics,

⁶⁵¹ From Luther’s translation of the Lord’s Prayer. “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Cf. Matthew 6:10, “ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου· γενηθῆτω τὸ θέλημα σου, ὡς ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς.”

⁶⁵² “Ich weiß für mich, daß ich, solange ich mein Erlebnis in Worten zusammenfassen kann, gewiß keine Musik hierüber machen würde,” more literally rendered as “For myself I know that, as long as I can summarize my experience in words, I would certainly not make any music about it.” Original German text cited from Gustav Mahler, *Briefe*, ed. Herta Blaukopf (Wien: Zsolnay, 1996), letter to Max Marschalk of March 26, 1896, 171.

⁶⁵³ The Austrian composer Anton Bruckner, who idolized Wagner as the “Meister aller Meister” (qtd. in Timothy L. Jackson and Paul Hawkshaw, eds., *Bruckner Studies* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997], xiii), and worshipfully fell on bended knee before his hero while kissing his hand after hearing *Parsifal* (David Dubal, *The Essential Canon of Classical Music* [New York: North Point Press, 2001], 305), nevertheless disregarded the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* to the extent that he is reputed to have attended performances of *Tristan und Isolde* as though it were a symphony, with his eyes kept firmly shut for the duration (Amanda Glauert, *Hugo Wolf and the Wagnerian Inheritance* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999], 2), and to have studied *Tristan* in the form of a piano score which was completely bereft of the dramatic text (Derek Watson, *Bruckner* [New York: Schuster & Macmillan, 1997], 19).

among others, they are always polemical in spirit. *Jesus von Nazareth* certainly falls into this category. The weakness of such works compared to Wagner's musical output in part seems to derive from their overwrought attempts at profundity. The Romanticism of Wagner's music imparts it a visceral emotive impact, but the same Romanticism in his writings gives them a sense of unsystematized and eclectically unrigorous obscurity. The Wagner of the written word was in a sense simply trying too hard to convey essentially ineffable ideas which required his music to find full expression.⁶⁵⁴ Indeed, one recalls that Wagner's statement of purpose in *Religion und Kunst*, where it is the job of art to locate the "inner kernel, the truth ineffably divine" of religion. This is in part why *Jesus von Nazareth* seems to pale so weakly in comparison to its musically-complete spiritual descendants, like *Parsifal*, where the abstract emotive impact of the music conjures forth an otherwise inexpressible spirituality from the mind of the listener, the music acting mainly as a catalyst for the a kind of *Verzückung* or religious ecstasy that is at root the product of its hearer's own stimulated consciousness.⁶⁵⁵ In contrast, the attempt to communicate such an experience through a solely verbal medium (such as in *Jesus von Nazareth*) results in failure, as its necessarily bungling directness and concreteness of language alone leaves little room for audient participation on a sufficiently imaginative level.

What is one to make of Wagner's overall religious outlook? That has been a subsidiary question in this thesis, but one that in the course of research has inevitably taken on an

⁶⁵⁴ There is an apocryphal tale told that Wagner sent the composer Jacques Offenbach, who was Jewish, a copy of his *Das Judentum in der Musik*. Offenbach is supposed to have laconically responded to Wagner that he would do better just writing music, whereupon Wagner then sent Offenbach a score of his *Meistersinger*. After playing through part of it, Offenbach wrote back to Wagner that on reconsideration, he would do better to continue writing books. See, e.g., A. S. Garbett, "Wagner and Offenbach," *The Etude*, ed. Theodore Presser, vol. 40, August 1922, 530, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=O-cxAQAAMAAJ>.

⁶⁵⁵ This phenomenon may in part explain the rationale behind Edgar Wilson Nye's famous quip (popularized by Mark Twain) that "Wagner's music is better than it sounds." (Mark Twain, *Mark Twain's Autobiography*, vol. 1 [Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2003], 338.)

increasingly large role. Its answer is ultimately among the key determinants of Wagner's intent in *Jesus von Nazareth* and in its echoes throughout his oeuvre. Wagner was raised as a Lutheran, and in *Mein Leben* he describes how in his early childhood he "had yearned with ecstatic fervour to hang upon the Cross in place of the Saviour," but already by the time of confirmation (Easter 1827), Wagner relates that he

had now so far lost his veneration for the clergyman ... as to be quite ready to make fun of him, and even to join with his comrades in withholding part of his class fees, and spending the money in sweets. How matters stood with me spiritually was revealed to me, almost to my horror, at the Communion service, when I walked in procession with my fellow-communicants to the altar to the sound of organ and choir. The shudder with which I received the Bread and Wine was so ineffaceably stamped on my memory, that I never again partook of the Communion, lest I should do so with levity. To avoid this was all the easier for me, seeing that among Protestants such participation is not compulsory.⁶⁵⁶

Wagner would go on to attend Protestant services sporadically as an adult, but his participation therein comes off more as culturally-acceptable lip-service than as genuine orthodox belief. Indeed, Wagner describes his utter incomprehension and indifference to the rites of the ceremony of his wedding to his first wife Minna, wherein the preacher bade him to look to "an unknown friend" in coming times of distress; Wagner then "glanced up inquiringly for further particulars of this mysterious and influential patron who chose so strange a way of announcing himself. Reproachfully, and with peculiar emphasis, the pastor then pronounced the name of this unknown friend: Jesus. Now I was not in any way insulted by this, as people imagined, but was simply disappointed."⁶⁵⁷ This episode is emblematic of the way in which Wagner's heterodoxy at times seems to spring almost as much from disinterest as from disbelief.

In the end, perhaps the closest categorization one can apply to Wagner is that of a resemblance to Marcionism. This second-century dualist heresy, named after its propounder,

⁶⁵⁶ Wagner, *My Life* (1911), 23-24.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 164-165.

Marcion of Sinope, essentially rejected the Old Testament and its God as incompatible with the New Testament as expounded by Jesus. Judaizing aspects of Christ's origins and ministry were regarded as corruptions. Tertullian, who opposed Marcion, nevertheless preserved the greatest amount of information on his opponent, and summarizes his thinking as follows:

Marcion lays it down that there is one Christ who in the time of Tiberius was revealed by a god formerly unknown, for the salvation of all the nations; and another Christ who is destined by God the Creator to come at some time still future for the re-establishment of the Jewish kingdom. Between these he sets up a great and absolute opposition, such as that between justice and kindness, between law and gospel, between Judaism and Christianity.⁶⁵⁸

One might suspect that Wagner himself would likely downplay any connection with Marcionism, and particularly with the emphasis laid by Marcion on the teachings of Paul, who holds the law and grace in unresolved tension. Additionally, though the Marcionite Christology is poorly understood, Wagner would also differ with its tendency towards Docetism; i.e., its emphasis on the divine rather than the human nature of Christ. Nor would the fact that Marcionite ideas would further be appropriated by "Positive Christianity" under National Socialism cast Wagner in a positive light, though there is no evidence that Wagner's own religious opinions had a direct influence on this development.⁶⁵⁹ However, Cosima records Wagner's reaction to Renan's *Les Eglises*: "The only thing that interests him is the mention of

⁶⁵⁸ Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, *Adversus Marcionem*, ed. and trans. Ernest Evans (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), "Book IV, Ch. 6," 275-276, accessed November 27, 2013, http://www.tertullian.org/articles/evans_marc/evans_marc_00index.htm.

⁶⁵⁹ There is an indirect connection. Wagner's disciple and biographer Houston Stewart Chamberlain shared the composer's embrace of Marcion. Chamberlain called Marcion "ein edler Mann (a noble man)," and the ultimate failure of his project to excise the Old Testament was "zum dauernden Unheil für das Christentum (a permanent calamity for Christendom)." (Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Mensch und Gott: Betrachtungen über Religion und Christentum* [München: F. Bruckmann, 1921], "Vorwort," vii-viii, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.hschamberlain.net/menschundgott/menschundgott.html>.) Chamberlain praises the same ideas expressed in Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich'sche Buchhandlung, 1924), accessed November 27, 2013, http://www.hschamberlain.net/marcion/marcion_00.html. Chamberlain's racist magnum opus, *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, was, in addition to its influence on Hitler himself, to serve as the explicit departure-point for *Der Mythos des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts* of the Nazi theorist Alfred Rosenberg, which shares Marcion's "opposition to the Semitic conception of a capricious God who exercised a boundless despotism." (Alfred Rosenberg, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, trans. anonymous [Sussex, England: Historical Review Press, 2004], 39).

Marcion (that he wished to separate the New from the Old Testament).”⁶⁶⁰ A few weeks later, Cosima continues, “Renan’s book provides him with another opportunity to talk about ‘the most horrible thing in history,’ the church, and the victory of Judaism over all else: ‘I can’t read two lines of Goethe without recognizing the Jewish Jehovah; for him Jesus was a problematical figure, but God was clear as crystal.’ He explains to us how Plato’s Theos paved the way for the Jewish God.”⁶⁶¹ Therefore, despite potential areas of disagreement, Wagner was plainly fascinated with Marcion and concurred with his conception of Jesus as having revealed the true God’s disconnection with Jehova.

Indeed, the weight of evidence is overwhelming that Wagner sought to separate Christianity from Judaism by purifying Christianity of its Jewish elements. Wagner’s focus on Jesus as redeemer (*Erlöser*) rather than on God as creator and ruler (κοσμοκράτωρ) was both causative and caused by this puritanical outlook, and he ignores the traditional parallel depiction of Christ as Almighty (παντοκράτωρ) alongside God. Wagner goes beyond mere dispensationalism, or the notion that God has interacted with men in different modes in different historical periods. Wagner advocates a full-blown supersessionism; that is, a replacement of the Old Covenant by the New. In *Jesus von Nazareth*, this does not yet take the form of “punitive” supersessionism, advocated by Luther, among others, which condemns the Jews for their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah, though one can see shades of this in Wagner’s later

⁶⁶⁰ Cosima Wagner, vol. 2., entry of Friday, January 23, 1880, 432.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid., entry of Tuesday, February 10, 1880, 438.

development, but rather comprises the “functional” marginalization of the Old Testament, which is further seen as irrelevant in elucidating the nature of God.⁶⁶²

Wagner also shares Marcion’s penchant for redaction. In order to justify his doctrines, Marcion of necessity had to reject the Old Testament, as does Wagner. Marcion moreover excluded from the New Testament all books except the Gospel of Luke (the first two chapters of which were still deemed too Jewish) and ten of the Pauline epistles.⁶⁶³ Though Wagner is obviously not this restrictive in terms of the content of *Jesus von Nazareth*, his method of eclectic citation is similar in its intent and in its somewhat self-serving motivation. Marcion also shared the Wagner’s radical denigration of conventional marriage, though not out of antinomianism. Marcion instead took Jesus’s doctrines, as expressed, e.g., in the Sermon on the Mount, to call for a stricter asceticism (including an un-Wagnerian celibacy) which exceeded the requirements of the law, identified, in Gnostic fashion, with the inherently-corrupt nature of the fleshly human body, deriving from the demiurgic false creator God.

This identification of Judaism and its God with the tyrannical law aroused in Wagner an opposition to all extended manifestations of the authoritative impulse, particularly in the form of his denigration of the Catholic Church as having persisted in this desire to dominate. Jesus, on the other hand, was the true bearer of love – for Wagner, a love whose very active expression is the source of its spiritual or metaphysical significance. Wagner’s fixation on Christ as the highest expression of love remained unchanged from the time of *Jesus von Nazareth* to the end.

⁶⁶² Daniel L. Gard, “The Church’s Scripture and Functional Marcionism,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, vol. 74 (2010): 209, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/GardScriptureandfunctionalMarcionism.pdf>.

⁶⁶³ John Arendzen, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 9., s.v. “Marcionites” (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910) , accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09645c.htm>.

It has also been mentioned that Wagner's eschatology tended toward a "fulfilled" perspective that saw Jesus's end-purpose as having been completed by the ethical example of his earthly ministry, rendering moot the necessity of a supernatural Second Coming. While this more liberal eschatological framework has attained increased popularity postdating Wagner's lifetime, it does seem to be in accord with his impatience and revolutionary fervor, to the extent that he readily sought to "immamentize the eschaton," to use a phrase coined by Eric Voegelin and popularized by William F. Buckley.⁶⁶⁴ This concept refers to the desire to accomplish metaphysical, supernatural, or otherwise utopian ends in this earthly life; essentially, to hyper-humanistically create heaven on Earth. Voegelin had detected correspondences between the ancient Gnostic heresies and modern extremist political philosophies, including communism and Nazism. This connection is germane, given the similarities between Wagner's beliefs and those of Marcionism, which has many overlapping congruencies with Gnosticism, though the category of Gnosticism itself is generally acknowledged to be a vaguely defined term of over-broad scope. In fact, the modern-day esotericist Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica lists Richard Wagner as one of its "saints" to be celebrated in its "Gnostic Mass."⁶⁶⁵

But to return to Voegelin, he found social alienation to be at the root of Gnosticism, and along with this, a sense of fundamental disorder in the world, which could be thought of as the disconnection between ideality and actual existence. Such alienation, as is well known, was also seized upon as a motivating force by Marx. While the original Gnostic Christians attempted to transcend this disorder and alienation through speculative means, i.e, through the attainment of

⁶⁶⁴ Cf. Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

⁶⁶⁵ "The Gnostic Mass, Liber XV, V. Of the Office of the Collects which are Eleven in Number, The Saints," accessed November 27, 2013, http://www.scarletwoman.org/docs/docs_mass.html. The assortment of "saints" included in this list is admittedly seemingly bewilderingly disconnected, though it also interestingly includes Friedrich Nietzsche.

mystical knowledge through a process of gnosis (γνῶσις), modern-day political revolutionaries have sought instead to actualize this metaphysical speculation, or in other words, to immamentize the eschaton. As Voegelin describes it, “The problem of an *eidos* in history, hence, arises only when a Christian transcendental fulfillment becomes immanentized. Such an immanentist hypostasis of the eschaton, however, is a theoretical fallacy.”⁶⁶⁶ To clarify, *eidos* (εἶδος) is the idealized “form” of Platonic provenance, which literally describes “that which is seen.”⁶⁶⁷ Attributing an overarching eidetic “meaning” to history is problematic in that the entirety of history is not an object that can be seen or experienced, particularly because it also encompasses future, as-yet-undetermined events.⁶⁶⁸ By hypostasis (ὑπόστασις), again borrowed from Plato (though the term can also refer to the persons of the Trinity), Voegelin means the reification, or actualization, of analytical concepts, in a manner that is inevitably dehumanizing.⁶⁶⁹ Voegelin also describes what he calls “the Gnostic personality,” which he sees as particularly troubled by its failure to accept the fundamental impermanence of temporal existence; this personality therefore attempts to freeze “history into an everlasting final realm on this earth.”⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁶⁶ Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 120.

⁶⁶⁷ For more on the alleged Platonic (and Hegelian) roots of teleological historicist authoritarianism, see Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966). Cf. further with Isaiah Berlin, *Freedom and Its Betrayal: Six Enemies of Human Liberty* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002). (Berlin’s authoritarian “enemies” are Fichte, Hegel, Helvétius, Rousseau, Saint-Simon, and de Maistre.)

⁶⁶⁸ Eric Voegelin, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 30, Selected Correspondence 1950-1984, ed. Thomas A. Hollweck (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2007), letter to Alfred Schütz of January 10, 1953, no. 39, 132. Voegelin further distinguishes between the possibility of meaning *in* history, which he accepts, and the meaning *of* history, which he rejects.

⁶⁶⁹ Jack Elliott, *Dictionary of Voegelinian Terminology*, s.v. “Hypostatization,” accessed November 27, 2013, <http://watershade.net/ev/ev-dictionary.html>.

⁶⁷⁰ Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, 160-161. Voegelin refers specifically to Thomas Hobbes in this connection.

The quotation from the Lord's Prayer above, which commands both the coming (ἐλθέτω) of God's kingdom and likewise the coming into being (γενηθήτω) of God's heavenly will on earth, could be understood to mandate a literal, immanent kingdom of heaven in this life if one takes the logically-debatable step of ascribing this kingdom (ἡ βασιλεία σου) as the actual content of God's aforesaid will (τὸ θέλημα σου).⁶⁷¹ This is precisely the conflation that Wagner makes in *Jesus von Nazareth*, though he would eventually reassess in his embrace of this very βασιλεία as in fact "nicht von dieser Welt." To return to the "theoretical fallacy" which Voegelin sees in the immanentizing impulse, Wagner's initial error in this regard in part springs from a subtle shift in his implementation of the phrase. Rather than merely affirming transcendental otherworldliness, the immanentist Wagner of *Jesus von Nazareth* seems to see a kingdom not "not of this world," but rather "from another world," implying a sort of direct access to the will of God (expressed in Feuerbachian terms in human nature itself) and thus the ability and even the duty to effect its actualization on earth. The simple amorphousness of "not of this world" was exchanged for the specificity of the wholesale transference of a hitherto only asymptotically approachable divinity into the reality of human existence.

As Wagner's outlook changed throughout his life, it, in fact, in its various phases came to encapsulate both the transcendental and the immanent perspectives. The younger, revolutionary Wagner of the era of *Jesus von Nazareth* certainly reflects the latter immanentist outlook in his embrace of the necessity of world-transformative change. While Wagner in *Jesus von Nazareth* does maintain the conventional interpretive contrast between the militant zealotry of Judas and

⁶⁷¹ This is the same conclusion which would be drawn by the liberal "Social Gospel" movement, which sought to "operationalize" the kingdom of heaven on earth from the Lord's Prayer; viz.: "It is evident that, if God's will is to be done on earth as it is in heaven, there is before us a golden age in which poverty, social injustice, war, class hatred, and all the other great evils which hang like festering sores on the body politic, will have disappeared." (Perry James Stackhouse, *The Social Ideals of the Lord's Prayer* [Philadelphia: Griffith and Rowland, 1916], 68, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=AJoXAAAAYAAJ>.)

Barabbas and the internal transformation preached by Jesus, his Jesus by no means advocates a transcendent, heavenly, or resurrective form of redemption, but rather an immanentized Messianic Age and the inauguration of an actualized Peaceable Kingdom, a world to come accomplished in this world.⁶⁷²

Shaw confirms that it was “reassuring” for the Feuerbachian Wagner “to assume that social revolution would be the natural outcome of the immanent logic of history.”⁶⁷³ However, the actual failure of revolution in practice led to the development of uncertainty vis-à-vis the relative merits of historical logic versus personal agency. John Toews has identified elements of this inherent dilemma within Young Hegeliansism which Wagner would eventually move beyond. The initial problem lay in the hollowness of the claim of the possibility of concretely realized autonomy for a self that was in reality overwhelmed by the state and by capitalism. The true paradox, however, consisted in the fact that

self-liberation and self-affirmation could become “real” only through a revolutionary destruction of the conditions and powers that inhibited their concrete historical actualization. The tasks of revolution, however, demanded self-renunciation, devotion to a common goal, commitment to suprapersonal values, belief in an objective meaning in history – that is, denial of precisely those values of autonomy, self-expression, and self-enjoyment that constituted the goal of a revolution which could finally “make an end” to the historical pathology of self-alienation. Self-liberation and the liberation of the world seemed to be both inextricably connected and inevitably in opposition to each other.⁶⁷⁴

As Shaw puts it, “the highest political ideals that philosophical reflection had generated seemed destined to be eviscerated by the profanity of political life.”⁶⁷⁵

⁶⁷² Cf. the Jewish eschatological concepts of the *Olam Haba* (הבא עולם) – the world to come – and the *Olam Hazeḥ* (עולם הזה) – this world.

⁶⁷³ Shaw, 41.

⁶⁷⁴ John Edward Toews, *Hegelianism: The Path Toward Dialectical Humanism, 1805-1841* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 369.

⁶⁷⁵ Shaw, 42.

The mature, Schopenhaurian Wagner would for the most part see such striving as futile, though his own egotism prevented him from lapsing into the same pessimism that Schopenhauer had. It would be more accurate, then, to say that Wagner's immanentizing impulse was transferred from socio-economic revolution to a spiritual and German nationalist regeneration. In both periods, he conceived of his music dramas as the illuminating force which would inspire the actualization of his ideas.

It is abundantly clear that Wagner approached the life of Jesus as a matrix upon which to develop his own religious perspective. In doing this, Wagner is of course not actually engaging in any grand departure from the Christian contemplative tradition, since Jesus, as a paramount figure of religious focus, has naturally functioned as a mutable template onto which the individual believer's own ideas are projected. Indeed, one of the main arguments of Schweitzer's 1906 *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung*⁶⁷⁶ is that most scholars who have quested after the historical Jesus have instead inevitably constructed a portrait of Jesus as they want to see him. Such a process is at some level at work in our understanding of any historical event or personage. Indeed, much of philosophy following Kant has revolved around the ways in which man's understanding of reality itself is conditioned by the manner in which he attempts to perceive it. All of this apparent paradox would in fact be in accord with Feuerbach's definition of God as a concept actually projected by man, since each man's projection must necessarily contain aspects unique to his own self. In any event, it is evident that when Wagner wrote *Jesus von Nazareth* he was little-influenced by the historical and textual methods utilized in Schweitzer's celebrated "quest." Nor was Wagner greatly affected by leading contemporary exponents thereof, such as

⁶⁷⁶ Generally freely translated as *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. See Albert Schweitzer, *Von Reimarus zu Wrede: eine Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1906), accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=1CQVAAAAYAAJ>.

D. F. Strauss. Schweitzer's great pursuit, which had so heavily preoccupied the "higher criticism" of the nineteenth century, was of secondary concern to the ideologically-minded Wagner and his philosophically-inflected Young Hegelian sensibilities, though he would later come to take an interest in the subject through his reading of the likes of Gfrörer and Renan.

As *Jesus von Nazareth* progresses as a document, it increasingly begins to take on the tone of a meditation by Wagner on the nature of spirituality and its intersections with society, while it moves away from concrete narrative development. *Jesus von Nazareth* is therefore ultimately either incomplete or overcomplete. It is incomplete in the sense that the theoretical underpinning that constitutes the bulk of Wagner's draft remains just that: theoretical and unintegrated into the narrative structure itself. The great strength of Wagner's mature music dramas is the very degree to which such integration between dramatic and philosophic concerns is apparent, or rather transparent, as Wagner manages to convey a substantial profundity which transcends the narrow confines of his ostensible diegetic worlds seemingly through the drama itself, to say nothing of the music. *Jesus von Nazareth* is closer to a treatise on theological aesthetics than to fluidly-flowing, self-contained drama.

It is overcomplete in the sense that it is hypertrophied beyond such seamless integration. Wagner may have attempted to do too much in drafting *Jesus von Nazareth*. In addition to all the qualities that he seeks to attach to the person of Jesus, the audience would inevitably project its own perceptions of Jesus onto the character. As a paramount historical personage with 2,000 years of accumulated interpretive development from innumerable sources, it is likely that the layers of meaning thereby concatenated may have proved too burdensome to arrive at a truly compelling, "round," and humanistic dramatic figure. As we have seen, Wagner himself quickly became aware of some of these difficulties inherent in his project.

In neither sense of completeness does *Jesus von Nazareth* function as the proper basis for musical development by Wagner, and it was clearly therefore never so developed. It did serve as a study-work in spirituality for Wagner, allowing him to clarify to himself the concepts and emphases with which he would later approach this domain essays like *Religion und Kunst* and dramatic works like *Parsifal*.

In *Mein Leben*, Wagner proposes that an individual develops “true immortality” from his “sublime deeds and great works of art.”⁶⁷⁷ This self-redemptive outlook does much to explain Wagner’s ultimate putting-aside of *Jesus von Nazareth*. Brazill has identified the aesthetic thrust of the Young Hegelian mentality in which the work was written as promoting artistic creation as a means of transcending a now-denied personal afterlife. This further entailed the development of the idea of the artist himself as “a Christ,” in the words of the Wagner’s friend, the poet Georg Herwegh,⁶⁷⁸ since the artist “fused spirit and matter in his own person and work,” objectifying freedom in the molding of his ideals with the external world, and thus uniting man and spirit in his artwork.⁶⁷⁹ The veritable enthronement of the artist in this manner immediately brings to mind Wagner’s theories in *Die Kunst und die Revolution* and *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*. So where then was the need to complete *Jesus von Nazareth* when the life of Christ became merely one deified utterance among many from an artist who had abrogated salvific bestowal unto

⁶⁷⁷ Wagner, *My Life*, (1911), 522.

⁶⁷⁸ Qtd. in Berry, *Treacherous Bonds and Laughing Fire*, 673.

⁶⁷⁹ Brazill, 273-274. Contrast with the argument for Christianity’s advancement of the arts put forward in Chateaubriand’s 1802 *Génie du christianisme*: “After all, the progress of literature was inseparable from the progress of religion, since it was in the language of Homer and Virgil, that the fathers explained the principles of the faith: the blood of martyrs, which was the seed of christians, [sic] caused likewise the laurel of the orator and the poet to flourish.” (François-René de Chateaubriand, *The Beauties of Christianity*, vol. 3, trans. Frederic Shoberl [London: H. Colburn, 1813], 216, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://books.google.com/books?id=ebc-AAAAYAAJ>.)

himself? In this context, it is fitting that Wagner's grave was inscribed with the cryptic lines of *Parsifal*'s final chorus,⁶⁸⁰ "Erlösung dem Erlöser."⁶⁸¹

Richard Wagner's appreciation of Jesus Christ was replete with inconsistencies and grew in complexity as his outlook matured. Nevertheless, Wagner's *Jesus von Nazareth* provides a fascinating window into a musical mind feverish with a revolutionary gospel of freedom that liberates man from legalism and materialism through love. This youthful Wagnerian vision was certainly utopian, and the congruency of his Jesus with the scriptural sources is highly questionable. But in addition to capturing the fervent spirit of the European revolutionary moment of 1848, *Jesus von Nazareth* served as an important lens in which Wagner's ideas of redemption and spirituality were developed and eventually subtly refracted in his later thought and works, particularly in Wagner's growing transformation and conception of *himself* into a redemptive force. *Jesus von Nazareth* is emblematic of Wagner's integrative aesthetics, affectionist ethics, sense of self-righteous social optimism, and immanent eschatology. This popular epigram comes close to distilling its essence:

Dance like there's nobody watching,

Love like you'll never be hurt,

⁶⁸⁰ Raymond Furness, *Wagner and Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 59.

⁶⁸¹ Most literally translated as "Redemption for the redeemer." Wagner, *Parsifal in Full Score*, 584-587. The ambiguity of the phrase "Erlösung dem Erlöser" is complicated by its vagary on at least three levels. The first is the multiple meanings attributable to the German dative case, meaning redemption alternatively "to" or "for" the redeemer. Interpreted instrumentally, one could even say "by" or "with." The second is the proliferation of free English translations, including "the (or even 'our') Redeemer redeemed." Finally, there is the lack of context provided by Wagner in the opera itself, where it is not at all clear to whom and what "Redeemer" and "redemption" actually refer, with several characters as possibilities in addition to Christ himself. Jesus is moreover not mentioned by name in *Parsifal*. See also David Goldman's claim, "To the Wagnerians, though, Wagner himself was the redeemer." (David P. Goldman, "Why We Can't Hear Wagner's Music," *First Things*, December 2010, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2010/11/why-we-cant-hear-wagners-quos-music>.)

Sing like there's nobody listening,
And live like it's heaven on earth.⁶⁸²

⁶⁸²

Attributed to William W. Purkey.

Appendix

Macr. Dresd. App. 2551, 295

Weisswein

Fischwein 155 R.

Reine Weine

Weisser Bordeaux 27 R.

1 Rüdesheimer Ausb.

1 Jekertengarten (R.)

1 Bisporter.

$\frac{1}{2}$ Deidesheimer (Ausb.)

$\frac{1}{2}$ Braunkühler (Ausb.)

Champagner

7 Flaschen (gr.)

6 $\frac{1}{2}$ halbe.

41 Flaschen Cognac.

According to a document held by the Saxon State and University Library in Dresden, Wagner's cellars are on the foregoing page shown to contain, among other holdings, 155 bottles of white wine and 41 bottles of cognac. The following page shows that Wagner's holdings also encompassed 180 bottles of red wine. Additionally, they included five bottles of Château Lafite (since 1868 known as Château Lafite Rothschild), a Bordeaux *Premier Grand Cru* which was then and today remains among the world's most expensive and prestigious wines – and ironically, for Wagner's purposes, could be considered a “Jewish” wine given its Rothschild associations.

While the exact date of the of this inventory is not known, it was found in the estate of Theodor Müller-Reuter (1858-1919), a conductor and composer from Dresden. The library record estimates circa 1876, which would coincide with Wagner's residence in Bayreuth, but the Château Lafite nomenclature suggests a pre-1868 vintage. Though this document may or may not necessarily date from Wagner's Dresden years (Müller-Reuter was born nine years after Wagner had fled the city, though the inventory could have come into his possession later), the evident extent of Wagner's œnophilia is in any event somewhat at odds with the professed political and economic sensibilities of his revolutionary period, and certainly is not in accordance with the concept of “to each according to his need.” Wagner was perhaps the original “champagne socialist.”⁶⁸³

⁶⁸³ “Autographisches Verzeichnis des Weinlagers - Mscr.Dresd.App.2551,295,” Die Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://digital.slub-dresden.de/id377584878>. Cf. further “Richard Wagner Treasures 2013,” Die Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.slub-dresden.de/en/about-us/events-exhibitions/book-museum/treasure-room/richard-wagner-treasures-2013/>.

Rothenwein

Fischwein: — 180 fl.

Reine Weine

1 Medoc.

5 Chateau Lafite.

30 Baron August.

R. Wagner's Landgriff.

Steckbrief.

Der unten etwas näher bezeichnete Königl.
Capellmeister

Richard Wagner von hier
ist wegen wesentlicher Theilnahme an der
in hiesiger Stadt stattgefundenen aufrührer-
rischen Bewegung zur Untersuchung zu zie-
hen, zur Zeit aber nicht zu erlangen gewe-
sen. Es werden daher alle Polizeibehörden
auf denselben aufmerksam gemacht und er-
sucht, Wagnern im Betretungsfalle zu ver-
haften und davon uns schleunigst Nachricht
zu ertheilen.

Dresden, den 16. Mai 1849.

Die Stadt-Polizei-Deputation.

—
von Oppell.

Wagner ist 37—38 Jahre alt, mittler
Statur, hat braunes Haar und trägt eine
Brille.

On the previous page: a warrant for Wagner's arrest issued in Dresden on May 16, 1849.⁶⁸⁴ Below: Wagner is depicted among "politically dangerous individuals" in a police gazette from 1853.⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁸⁴ "Richard Wagners Steckbrief 1849," Wikipedia, accessed November 27, 2013, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Richard_Wagners_Steckbrief_1849.jpg. (Originally published in the *Dresdner Anzeiger*, no. 139, 1849.)

⁶⁸⁵ "Wagner-Steckbrief 1853," Wikimedia Commons, accessed November 27, 2013, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wagner-Steckbrief_1853.jpg.

Politisch gefährliche Individuen.



Richard Wagner
ehemal. Kapellmeister und politischer Flüchtling
aus Dresden.

652) Wagner, Richard, ehemaliger Kapellmeister aus Dresden, einer der hervorragendsten Anhänger der Umsturzpartei, welcher wegen Theilnahme an der Revolution in Dresden im Mai 1849 steckbrieflich verfolgt wird, soll beabsichtigen, sich von Zürich aus, woselbst er sich gegenwärtig aufhält, nach Deutschland zu begeben. Behufs seiner Habhaftwerdung wird ein Portrait Wagner's im Betretungsfalle zu verhaften und an königliche Stadtgericht zu Dresden abzuliefern sein dürfte, hier beigelegt."

Eberhardts Allgemeiner Polizei-Anzeiger, Dresden,
11. Juli 1853



RICHARD WAGNER IN HIMMEL. — Richard Wagner am Ciel.

Richard Wagner zu den Engeln. — Meine lieben Engel! Der Empfang ist recht hübsch, aber ohne Pauken und Trompeten werden Sie nie eine Wirkung erzielen!

Wagner s'adressant aux anges. — Mes chers petits anges! la réception est tout à fait charmante, mais sans timbales et sans trompettes jamais vous n'obtiendrez une exécution.

(Köln, 18 février 1881.)

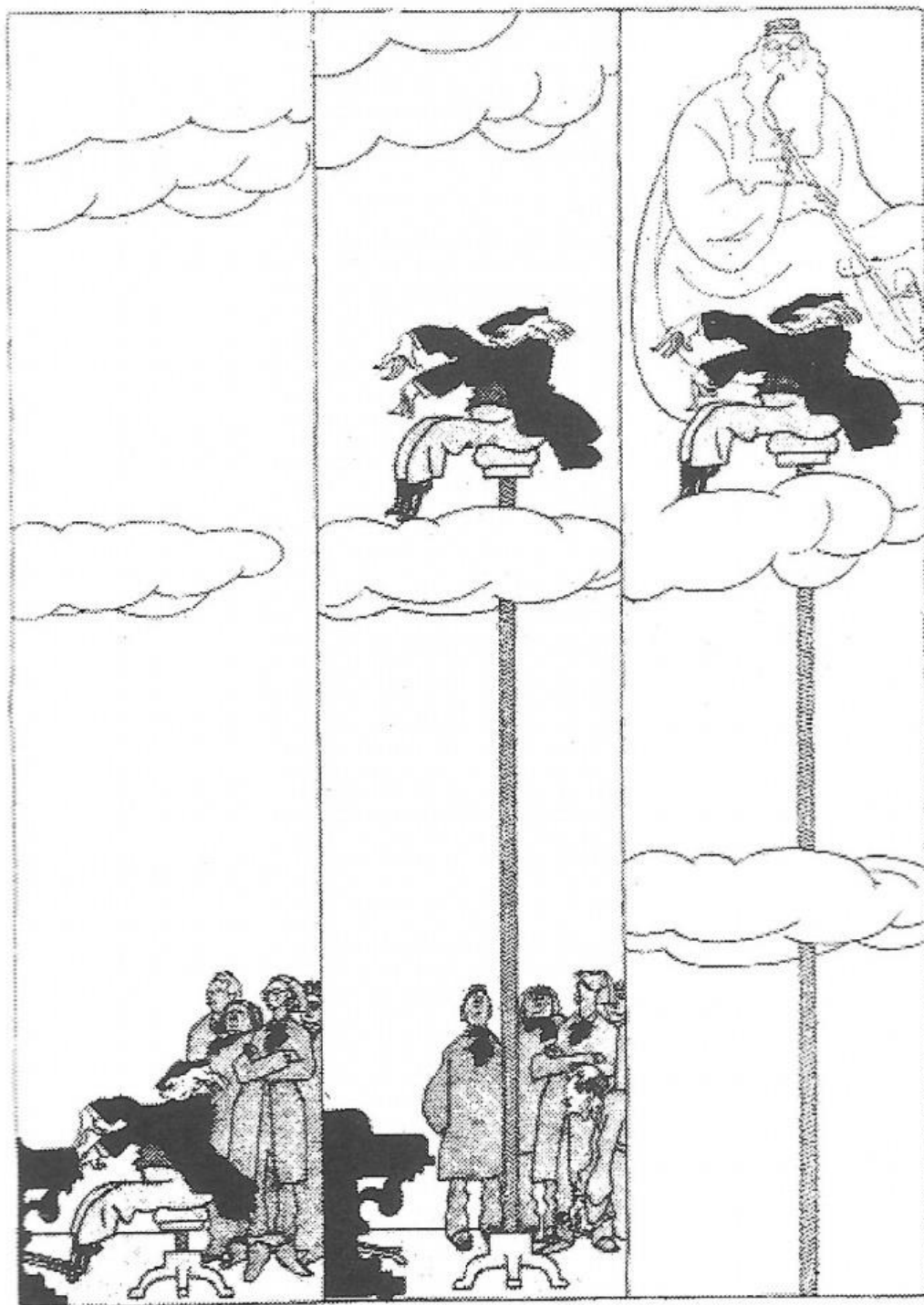
Richard Wagner, par GRAND-CARTERET.

Wagner was among the most-caricatured figures of his era, and particularly after his death, these satires sometimes depicted Wagner in heaven, a belief in which he himself did not necessarily affirm in *Jesus von Nazareth* or elsewhere. The above caricature, mocking the reputed loudness of Wagner's music with angels playing harps, reads "Thank you for your welcome, dear angels, but without drums and trumpets you'll never make an impression!"⁶⁸⁶ (Ironically, Wagner's final opera *Parsifal* calls for two harps, twice the more typical orchestral complement, and the *Ring* music dramas, generally parodied as Wagner's most bombastic works, actually require six harps, and seven in the case of *Das Rheingold*.)

On the following page, Wagner's hypertrophied pretentiousness is lampooned, with a sort of heaven-on-earth depiction of self-apotheosis that certainly recalls the "immamentization of the eschaton," and perhaps is reminiscent the symbolism of Aristophanes's *The Clouds* (Νεφέλαι).⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸⁶ Reproduced from John Grand-Carteret, *Richard Wagner en caricatures: 130 reproductions de caricatures françaises, allemandes, anglaises, italiennes, portraits: autographes (lettre et musique) dessins originaux de J. Blass, Moloch et Tiret-Bognet* (Paris, Librairie Larousse, 1892), 131, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://archive.org/details/richardwagnerenc00gran>. (Originally published as "An der Himmelsthüre" in *Der Junge Kikeriki*, Vienna, February 18, 1883.) Caption translated by Susan Clermont, cited in Clermont above.

⁶⁸⁷ Reproduced from "Wagner 2 – Family Affairs," accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.learnclassical.com/the-courses/wagner/wagner-2-family-affairs-harmony-keys-1/>, which gives attribution to "Gulbranson, 1913," presumably the Wagnerian soprano Ellen Gulbranson (1863-1947). Also reproduced in Gabriele Förg, ed., *Unsere Wagner: Joseph Beuys, Heiner Müller, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Hans Jürgen Syberberg: Essays*, (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1984). Wagner himself at times employed the methods of Aristophanic comedy, despite having attacked the playwright as destructive to the tradition of Athenian tragic drama and indeed harmful to the Athenian state itself in *Die Kunst und die Revolution*. Wagner's Aristophanic emulation is most overt in his *Eine Kapitulation* (A Capitulation), a farcical and fairly tasteless depiction of the Prussian Siege of Paris in which Wagner sought to take revenge against Jacques Offenbach and others for his own failures in that city. Wagner subtitled the play "Lustspiel in Antiker Manier (Comedy in the Ancient Style)" and originally contemplated (though eventually decided against) publishing it under the ham-handed pseudonym "Aristop Hanes." (Daniel H. Foster, *Wagner's Ring Cycle and the Greeks* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010], 193 and 340.)



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