

DAVID S. ROBINSON

Christ and Revelatory  
Community in Bonhoeffer's  
Reception of Hegel

*Dogmatik in der Moderne*

22

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Mohr Siebeck

# Dogmatik in der Moderne

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und Friederike Nüssel

22





David S. Robinson

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Reception of Hegel

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*David S. Robinson*, born 1980; 2003 BA; 2008 MDiv; 2017 PhD in Systematic Theology and Ethics from The University of Edinburgh; currently Post-Doctoral Fellow in Theology and Science at Regent College and Research Associate at Vancouver School of Theology, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.  
orcid.org/0000-0002-8552-4369

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*For my mother and father*



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The community in itself is what produces this doctrine, this relationship. The latter is not something produced from the word of Christ, so to speak, but through the community, the church.

– G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*

The Word is the rock upon which the Idealist *Geist*-monism founders; for the Word implies that sin still exists, that absolute *Geist* has to fight for its rule, that the church remains a church of sinners.

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*





# Introduction

## A. Juxtaposing Monuments

There is a stark difference between two monuments that stand outside Humboldt University in Berlin.<sup>1</sup> The first monument lists Dietrich Bonhoeffer among the names of twelve people who died between 1938–1945. The inscription gathers the names as ‘those who fell in the struggle against Hitler’s fascism’. Beside the list, two contorted fists protrude from iron bars wound with barbed wire. There is no facial representation. Although Bonhoeffer lost his teaching license in 1936, in part for association with an illegal seminary, the university now places him with the collective that commands the attention of current students and faculty. ‘Their death is an obligation to us’, the inscription reads.

The second monument features the name ‘Hegel’ on a tall stone column with no identifying date, place, or title. The bust at the top is pitched slightly forward, lips pursed and eyes intent. The clarity of the presentation calls to mind Hegel’s description of the philosopher, particularly in contrast to the political actor. In a lecture delivered at the university in the 1820s, Hegel states that in political history ‘the subject of deeds and events is the individual in his particular natural make-up, genius, passions, energy, or weakness of character – in a word, what makes him *this* individual’.<sup>2</sup> The philosopher who surveys that history stands in marked contrast:

Here on the other hand the productions are all the more excellent the less is their merit attributed to a particular individual, the more, on the other hand, do they belong to freedom of thinking, to the general character of the human being as human being, the more is thinking itself, devoid of personality, the productive subject.<sup>3</sup>

Hegel’s claim to speak for ‘thinking itself’ would be subjected to Søren Kierkegaard’s scorn. In one of several jibes, Kierkegaard points out the irony in-

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<sup>1</sup> The university was founded as The University of Berlin, a title that covered the period of Hegel’s professorship. It was known to Bonhoeffer as Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität and today goes by the name Humboldt-Universität.

<sup>2</sup> *LHP*, 9.

<sup>3</sup> *LHP*, 9.

volved in a claim to discern the course of reason in world history without explicitly accounting for oneself.<sup>4</sup> Bonhoeffer draws on Heidegger to take a similar critical line, stating that ‘Hegel wrote a philosophy of angels, not of human beings as *Dasein*’.<sup>5</sup> Idealism, especially as represented by Hegel, appears to have reached a ‘synopsis of act and being’, Bonhoeffer observes, ‘if only those doing the philosophising themselves did not founder on the resistance of their own reality to this philosophy’.<sup>6</sup>

The stark difference between the monuments should not obscure the significant similarities between Bonhoeffer and Hegel. Although they each offered original contributions to their fields of theology and philosophy, neither understood himself as an ‘individual’ thinker. Each sought to articulate the constitutive social aspect of human reason, acknowledging the question of God as integral to this task. Engaging the Lutheran theological tradition, each sought to challenge a sharp distinction between divinity and humanity, taking seriously the ways that revelation ‘becomes’ the community. Specifically, convictions about the ‘real presence’ of Christ in the Eucharist led them to articulate an account of God not only within, but *as* human social relations. These endeavours carried strong ethical implications, as shown throughout their highly contested reception histories.

## B. From Disruptive Word to Revelatory Community

A great deal of Bonhoeffer’s critical engagement with Hegel involves the relation of Word, the divine address embodied in Christ, to *Geist*, collective ‘spirit’ or ‘mind’. With Hegel in view, Bonhoeffer will often portray the Word as a disruptive presence vis-à-vis communal patterns of reason and practice. He signals this approach in his first dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio*, by claiming that ‘the Word is the rock upon which the Idealist *Geist*-monism founders’.<sup>7</sup> In Bonhoeffer’s 1933 Christology lectures, which occur in the same year as his Hegel seminar, a ‘counter-*logos*’ [*Gegenlogos*] confronts a merely ‘human-*logos*’ [*Menschenlogos*], with Hegel’s shrewd account of reason singled out within the latter.<sup>8</sup> By speaking of a ‘disruption of the Word’ in this sense, Bonhoeffer draws on a Lutheran commitment to the ‘external’ Word while also

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Too bad that Hegel, merely for the sake of illusion, did not have 1843 years at his disposal, for then he presumably would have had time to make the test as to whether the absolute method, which could explain all world history, could also explain the life of one single human being.’ Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 201.

<sup>5</sup> *DBWE* 2, 42; *DBW* 2, 35.

<sup>6</sup> *DBWE* 2, 42; *DBW* 2, 35.

<sup>7</sup> *DBWE* 1, 212; *DBW* 1, 143.

<sup>8</sup> *DBWE* 12, 302; *DBW* 12, 282.

alluding to Karl Barth's early work that, in Gary Dorrien's words, 'abounded with metaphors of disruption, cleavage, and faith'.<sup>9</sup>

Bonhoeffer's emphasis on the *disruptive* Word is provoked, in part, by Hegel's focus on the work of the spirited community in the construction of doctrine. Hegel asserts that doctrine is not produced by the 'Word of Christ, so to speak', but by the community.<sup>10</sup> In Nicholas Adams' gloss, Hegel criticises religious thinking because 'it treats what it freely *produces* as something alienly *received*'.<sup>11</sup> As Adams also notes, however, Hegel's response risks its own 'false opposition'. I argue that such overcorrection provokes Bonhoeffer to accentuate the externality of the Word. As Bonhoeffer nevertheless maintains Luther's insistent '*est*', testimony to the present Christ given in and through the community, his work is a promising resource for intra-Lutheran 'repair'.<sup>12</sup>

The task of 'repair' involves attending to the nuance in both Hegel's and Bonhoeffer's positions, which are not reducible to the *Gegenlogos-Menschenlogos* dialectic. For one, Hegel is also conditioned by a Lutheran emphasis on the community's *reception*. In a statement highlighted in Bonhoeffer's edition of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel states that concerning 'positive' elements of the 'absolute religion', '*everything must come to us in an external manner*'.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Bonhoeffer does not merely portray the Word as an external, disruptive force. *Act and Being* is an attempt to challenge a reduction of revelation to mere 'act' – a punctiliar disruption of otherwise immanent processes. To that end, he states that revelation is 'held fast' by the community:

God gives the divine self in Christ to the community of faith and to every individual as member of this community of faith. This happens in such a way that the acting subject in the community of faith, proclaiming and believing, is Christ...Hence the gospel is somehow held fast here. God's freedom has woven itself into this personlike community of faith, and it is precisely this which manifests what God's freedom is: that God binds God's self to human beings.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Dorrien goes on to note the irony that 'for all of Barth's warnings about the narrowness and hubris of theological systems, his dogmatics took on the appearance of a massive new Scholasticism'. Gary Dorrien, *Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 469, 487.

<sup>10</sup> *LPR III*, 254; *VPR III*, 198.

<sup>11</sup> The criticism is summarised with reference to the *Phenomenology* in Nicholas Adams, *The Eclipse of Grace: Divine and Human Action in Hegel* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 69.

<sup>12</sup> Adams calls for a 'repair' of Hegel's thought on this point, suggesting the use of a 'NeoPlatonic strand in Christian negative theology'. See Adams, *Eclipse*, 69.

<sup>13</sup> *NL-VPR III*, 19.

<sup>14</sup> *DBWE* 2, 112; *DBW* 2, 108.

Emphasis on the social continuity of revelation is already signalled in *Sanctorum Communio*, where Bonhoeffer adopts Hegel's notions of a historically conditioned 'objective *Geist*' and a divine, self-revealing subject 'existing as community'.<sup>15</sup> This theological trajectory drives Bonhoeffer's criticism of Barth's early 'actualism' and later 'positivism of revelation'.

The adjective 'revelatory' is taken from the subtitle of the third volume of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, the focus of Bonhoeffer's 1933 seminar. This text records Hegel's use of the evocative phrase 'God existing as community' in the context of his engagement with the Lutheran doctrine of the Eucharist. Revelation was not merely ecclesial for Hegel, however, and much of his other work attends to social 'orders' beyond the church.<sup>16</sup> That broader philosophical project was shaped inevitably by Hegel's status as a civil servant at the recently founded University of Berlin in the early nineteenth century.

Insofar as Bonhoeffer also portrays the ways that revelation becomes the community, Hegel's claim to 'God existing as community' proves congenial to his work. However, from his first dissertation onwards Bonhoeffer persistently changes the subject so that the phrase reads 'Christ existing as community'. That variation can stand as a shorthand for Bonhoeffer's complex engagement with Hegel over Christology, ecclesiology, history, and political philosophy. It indicates a posture of reception that I characterise as both eclectic and Christologically intent. Such characteristics are also conditioned by history, of course: Bonhoeffer's variations on Hegel were part of a critical response to the work of church 'deconfessionalisation' that had occurred in the intervening years.

### C. Ferment of the Mind: Textual Reception and its 'Matrices'

This study prioritises Bonhoeffer's reception of Hegel's texts. The key work for his exposition is the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Georg Lasson. Bonhoeffer also refers to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Geist*, *Philosophy of Right*, and *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline*. During the dissertations, many of his interactions come at second-hand, in and through the work of supervisors. My study will therefore focus on the lectures

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<sup>15</sup> As Bonhoeffer states: 'The church is the presence of Christ in the same way that Christ is the presence of God. The New Testament knows a form of revelation, "Christ existing as community".' *DBWE I*, 140–41; *DBW I*, 87.

<sup>16</sup> This broader interest is indicative of his Lutheran commitment. As Stephen Houlgate observes, Hegel credits Luther with stressing that 'Christian faith and love are properly expressed in the *sittlich* spheres of family life and civil society'. Stephen Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel: Freedom, Truth and History*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 263–64.

Bonhoeffer delivered in 1932–33, as they surround his expository Hegel seminar.

The textual focus of this study is important in light of the interpretive challenge posed by both Hegel's and Bonhoeffer's writings, which led Karl Barth to advise care in approaching their respective works. As to Bonhoeffer, Barth praises his early ecclesiology, as well as his clear and courageous response to the oppression of the Jews, even as he questions the elusiveness of Bonhoeffer's theological terms. 'Do we not always expect him to be clearer and more concise in some other context', Barth writes to a correspondent, 'either by withdrawing what he said, or by going even further?'<sup>17</sup> Fifteen years later, in a letter to Eberhard Bethge, Barth opines that systematic theology was not Bonhoeffer's strongest field and laments that Bonhoeffer's turbulent life and early death cut short his remarkable ability to evolve.<sup>18</sup> Barth also counsels interpretive caution when reading Hegel. Commenting on Hegel's far more developed body of work and longer reception history, Barth queries whether the true age of Hegel was yet to come. Whether or not Hegel would become the 'Aquinas' of Protestantism, Barth warns readers to think three times before contradicting him, for they would likely find their contradiction already voiced within Hegel's system – and given its best possible answer.<sup>19</sup> It is a warning often ignored by critics that overstate the effectiveness of a young doctoral student's criticism.

Claims to intellectual influence extend well beyond textual transmission, of course. While text-focused 'genealogical' enquiries are often sophisticated, Kwame Anthony Appiah warns that 'that metaphor is perhaps too determinate – in the mode of those biblical catalogs of begats – to capture the ferment of the mind'.<sup>20</sup> Appiah speaks instead of 'matrices', attention to which involves wider political currents as well as a variety of a thinker's peers in order to gain a sense of what ideas were 'in the air'.<sup>21</sup> This study will identify two additional matrices involved in Bonhoeffer's reception: interlocutors and political context.

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<sup>17</sup> Karl Barth, 'Letter to P.W. Herrenbrück, 21 December 1952', in *World Come of Age: A Symposium on Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. R. Gregor Smith (London: Collins, 1967), 90.

<sup>18</sup> Barth warns against fixing Bonhoeffer into a trajectory based on previous writings, speculating on how his own work might have been construed were he to have died after the publication of the *Römerbrief*, or immediately following the 1927 *Christliche Dogmatik*. Barth rejected the latter volume years later for the new approach that became the *Church Dogmatics*. Barth's letter to Bethge is reprinted in André Dumas, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian of Reality*, trans. Robert McAfee Brown (London: SCM Press, 1971), 239–42.

<sup>19</sup> Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (London: SCM Press, 1972), 396.

<sup>20</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Lines of Descent: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Emergence of Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 4.

<sup>21</sup> See Appiah, *Lines*, 4–5.

As to *interlocutors*, Bonhoeffer received much of his Hegel education from Reinhold Seeberg, his first doctoral supervisor, as well as Wilhelm Lütgert, who specialised in Idealism and supervised Bonhoeffer's *Habilitationsschrift*. Moreover, Bonhoeffer's university courses, including a 1927 series on the philosophy of culture by Eduard Spranger, exposed him to the neo-Hegelian 'revival' of the 1920s.<sup>22</sup> As shown by his early seminar papers, he was also aware of a larger 'speculative trajectory' that followed on from Hegel and minimised confessional and biblical interest.<sup>23</sup> Alongside these Berlin instructors, Bonhoeffer's thinking was also formed through a longstanding dialogue with his friend and fellow student Franz Hildebrandt, whose own dissertation appropriates several of Hegel's ideas.

As to the *political context*, there was a significant movement of German neo-Hegelianism in Bonhoeffer's time. Although Bonhoeffer was no longer based in the academy after 1936, the work of legal philosophers such as Carl Schmitt and Karl Larenz would have confronted him through laws introduced under the Third Reich. Neo-Hegelianism, however contestable its claim to Hegel's thought, came to present a nationalist and exclusive political settlement.<sup>24</sup> This contextual note should be qualified, however, by the fact that Bonhoeffer did not have a mono-cultural experience of Hegel reception. During his exchange period in America, for instance, he came across the work of W.E.B. Du Bois, whose critical work with Hegel cut against the grain of national and racial exceptionalism.

## D. From Theology to Philosophy – and Back Again

This book draws on recent scholarship that depicts Hegel as a philosopher who is interested in the logical forms derived from Christian doctrine.<sup>25</sup> In other

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<sup>22</sup> The background of emerging movements emphasising synthesis or 'the whole' is recounted in Fritz Ringer, *Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community 1890–1933*, Reprint ed. (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1990), 305–314, 365, 384–403.

<sup>23</sup> In a 1926 seminar paper, Bonhoeffer observes that '[s]ince Schleiermacher, theology had partly been allowed to grow speculative and wild – this is especially evident in Hegel's student Biedermann – and partly was constrained by biblicism. At any rate it seemed to have distanced itself a long way from Lutheran-Reformed doctrine'. *DBWE* 9, 404; *DBW* 17, 30 [published in the *Register und Ergänzungen*].

<sup>24</sup> See Andreas Grossmann, 'German neo-Hegelianism and the Plea for Another Hegel', in *The Impact of Idealism: The Legacy of Post-Kantian German Thought, Volume II*, ed. John Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 232–259.

<sup>25</sup> I draw on Adams' distinction between philosophy – a 'second-order discourse' that investigates systems of classification and the rules that govern judgments – and theology as a 'first-order' task of articulating doctrinal loci that takes its categories and rules of judgment for granted. Adams, *Eclipse*, 167–68.

words, I do not read him primarily as a theologian, much less one who seeks to revise Christian dogma. Such an explicitly doctrinal project is suggested by titles that depict him as a ‘theologian of Spirit’ or as developing a distinct ‘Christology’.<sup>26</sup> Hegel’s multi-layered treatment of *Geist*, typically translated ‘spirit’, can lead to the assumption that he develops an alternative pneumatology. I argue, in contrast, that Hegel does not offer a competing theology of the Holy Spirit, even though Trinitarian doctrine informs his philosophical account. If Hegel is primarily interested in Christian theology in order to investigate its logic, rather than to articulate an idiosyncratic doctrinal statement, his work may be less threatening to the theologian.<sup>27</sup> Insofar as threat does exist, it is best handled by a ‘turn to the texts’ following a period marked by broad and misleading overviews.<sup>28</sup> Such expositional work should acknowledge diachronic distinction while identifying both ‘epic’ and ‘dramatic’ tendencies in Hegel’s thought.<sup>29</sup>

Along with depicting Hegel as a philosopher first, I readily acknowledge Hegel’s insistence on his Lutheran confession. As Hegel was also accused of heterodoxy during his lifetime, often for holding a form of ‘pantheism’, he sought to defend himself both in published works and personal correspondence. To take one example, in a late letter, Hegel asserts his defence against challenges to the integrity of his Christian doctrine, while criticising rationalist approaches to the Trinity in turn: ‘I am a Lutheran, and through philosophy have been at once completely confirmed in Lutheranism. I detest seeing such things explained in the same manner as perhaps the descent and dissemination of silk culture, cherries, smallpox, and the like’.<sup>30</sup> Although there were important political motivations behind such a profession, Stephen Houlgate rightly states that it would be ‘wilful to dismiss this as subterfuge’.<sup>31</sup> I therefore

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<sup>26</sup> See the anthology *Hegel: Theologian of Spirit*, ed. Peter Hodgson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997) as well as James Yerkes, *The Christology of Hegel* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978).

<sup>27</sup> Hegel is explicit that logic is his primary concern, as observed in Adams, *Eclipse*, xviii.

<sup>28</sup> The case is made for close exposition of primary sources, situated within a summary of the field, in Adams, *Eclipse*, xvii.

<sup>29</sup> In Adams’ interpretation, Hegel shows tendencies towards both ‘epic metaphysics’, which establishes the true nature of reality from a position of supreme insight, and ‘dramatic metaphysics’, which begins from the human ‘middle’ and constructs an account of reality from there. *Science of Logic* is given as an example of the former, with *Phenomenology of Geist* representing the latter. Adams, *Eclipse*, 16.

<sup>30</sup> G.W.F. Hegel to Friedrich August G. Tholuck, July 3, 1826, *Hegel: The Letters*, trans. Clark Butler and Christiane Seiler (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1984), 519–20; cited in Dorrien, *Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit*, 222.

<sup>31</sup> Houlgate, *Hegel*, 254.



attend to the confessional aspects of Hegel's texts, demurring over claims that he is inadvertently heterodox or practically an atheist.<sup>32</sup>

Along with having a basis in Lutheran theology, Hegel's philosophy has itself become a source for much subsequent theology. Adams observes that Hegel's work 'generates the German philosophical lexicon through which many of the imaginative moves in the twentieth century are cast'.<sup>33</sup> As a result of Hegel's pervasive influence, a theologian can be overtly critical of him while still appropriating his thought forms.<sup>34</sup> Insofar as Bonhoeffer works downstream from Hegel, many of his terminological and conceptual choices are best understood by having Hegel's project in view. At times he will react against his predecessor, of course. For instance, Bonhoeffer's depiction of the disruptive Word should be understood as, in part, a reaction against a Lutheran 'pneumaticism' that informs Hegel's project.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, I argue that the background of Hegel's account of *Geist* helps to explain why Bonhoeffer does not give much explicit attention to pneumatology as a doctrinal *locus*.<sup>36</sup> Rather than criticising him for lacking systematic 'balance', a reader can come to appreciate his attempt to foreground what is lacking in his time, namely, the distinctive 'mind' and body of Christ.

This book comes at a period of renewed interest in Hegel in English-language scholarship. Hegel's published works are in the midst of being translated for new critical editions.<sup>37</sup> Another set of volumes presents Hegel's various lecture series in diachronic rather than composite fashion.<sup>38</sup> Regarding editorial

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<sup>32</sup> In spite of a catalogue of heretical sources, Cyril O'Regan observes that 'Hegel presumes himself not to be deviating from the spirit of Lutheran confession'. Cyril O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel* (New York, NY: SUNY Press, 1994), 195. Oswald Bayer asserts that Hegel's secularisation of Christian freedom, 'which is primarily real only in promise', involves a theoretical turn in which 'he is an atheist, despite the fact that he saw himself as a Lutheran!' Oswald Bayer, *Freedom in Response – Lutheran Ethics: Sources and Controversies*, trans. Jeffrey F. Cayzer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 85.

<sup>33</sup> Following this influence, Adams continues that 'Hegel's theological innovations are quite secondary'. Those innovations, he admits, are susceptible to the charge of heresy. Adams, *Eclipse*, 4, 220, 226.

<sup>34</sup> For example, Barth criticises Hegel's Pelagianism even as he displays neo-Hegelian tendencies in *Church Dogmatics*. Adams, *Eclipse*, 3.

<sup>35</sup> Hegel is said to radicalise the 'pneumaticism' that was crucial to revelation for Luther. See O'Regan, *Heterodox Hegel*, 39, 150.

<sup>36</sup> The charge that Bonhoeffer lacks a pneumatology is reiterated in Rowan Williams, 'Margins and Centres: Bonhoeffer's Christ', (Hulsean Lectures, University of Cambridge, February 16, 2016).

<sup>37</sup> Cambridge University Press has published the *Encyclopaedia* and *Science of Logic*. The draft form of *Phenomenology of Geist* is currently in circulation, and will be published in 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Oxford University Press has been reprinting Hegel's lecture series, with Peter Hodgson serving as a lead editor.

commentary and interpretive literature, Frederick Beiser observes that the 'Hegel Renaissance' involves adaptations to current philosophical trends.<sup>39</sup> At least three dominant schools of philosophical interpretation can be identified: materialist readings, based in the *Phenomenology*, which tends to collapse divine agency into an atheistic history; neo-pragmatist readings in which Hegel works from the Kantian project to articulate the social construction of reality; and metaphysical readings that refer primarily to the *Science of Logic* and *Encyclopaedia* with an emphasis on the concept of 'infinity'.<sup>40</sup> In the midst of such interest, theological concerns are frequently marginal. It is a particularly critical time, then, for reception accounts of particular theologians that show how Hegel both receives Christian doctrine and comes to influence it in turn.

Bonhoeffer certainly understood philosophy with a view to its doctrinal origins. He observes at one point that German-Continental traditions, including Idealism, 'are based on philosophical-methodological demands derived from theological insights'.<sup>41</sup> In *Ethics*, he describes the political crisis of the early 1940s as a time when many important philosophical concepts find a way back to their origin in the church after a period of estrangement.<sup>42</sup> The language of estrangement and return is ironic when heard in relation to Hegel, whose account of *Geist* proceeds through such a movement. In any case, Bonhoeffer speaks of recovered alliance more often than threat in his later writings.

## E. Beyond Revolt: A Case for 'Eclectic' Reception

Bonhoeffer tends to allow philosophy its own integrity while making his resolutely theological interest clear. As early as *Sanctorum Communio* he compares philosophical and theological enquiry through the analogy of how sound is perceived. 'Just as sound lies in different spheres of perception for musicians and physicists,' Bonhoeffer claims, 'so it is with time for Idealist epistemology and for a Christian concept of person, without the one sphere cancelling out

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<sup>39</sup> The Hegel renaissance is a 'puzzling' phenomenon, understandable only because of those 'nonmetaphysical' interpreters who have rendered him more acceptable to a secular, positivist age. See Frederick Beiser, 'Introduction: The Puzzling Hegel Renaissance', in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth Century Philosophy*, ed. Frederick Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3–5.

<sup>40</sup> The schools are sketched in Graham Ward, 'How Hegel Became a Philosopher: Logos and the Economy of Logic', *Critical Research on Religion* 1, no. 3 (2013), 272.

<sup>41</sup> *DBWE* 15, 443; *DBW* 15, 437.

<sup>42</sup> *DBWE* 6, 132; *DBW* 6, 124.

the other'.<sup>43</sup> Having identified disciplinary difference, Bonhoeffer frequently sidesteps philosophical questions, declining, for example, debate on the existence of an 'external world'.

This study presents Bonhoeffer's employment of philosophy, among other disciplines, in the service of his first-order theological work. The first sentence of Bonhoeffer's preface to *Sanctorum Communio* makes his regular intention clear: 'in this study social philosophy and sociology are employed in the service of theology'.<sup>44</sup> As Michael Mawson has argued, Bonhoeffer is not primarily interested in providing grounds for a dialogue between disciplines.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, Bonhoeffer's willingness to engage philosophical terms is tempered by the awareness that the transferral of concepts can 'burst the framework' of the host discipline.<sup>46</sup> When such a threat is identified, he is willing to issue sharp criticism of philosophical figures and movements, as shown in his depiction of 'Idealism' as particularly susceptible to the 'incurvature of the self'.

Why then did Bonhoeffer choose to lead an expositional seminar on Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* in 1933? In Jörg Rades' words, Bonhoeffer sought to recover, in the midst of a crisis in German history, his lost cultural inheritance 'in the proper way by reading and then interpreting it'.<sup>47</sup> Such broader cultural interest is always framed by Bonhoeffer's commitments to the authority of scripture and the Lutheran confessions. In other words, he read Hegel for the task of ecclesial theology before any desire to produce work that is 'philosophically interesting'. As a result, Bonhoeffer does not stake everything either for or against Hegel. He remained, as Ralf Wüstenberg observes, adherent to no single philosophical school.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *DBWE* 1, 48; *DBW* 1, 28. The sound analogy is apt, for Bonhoeffer describes the act of 'hearing' revelation as evoking a person's active centres of intellect and will. Borrowing a concept from Seeberg, he describes this reception as the 'formal presupposition' of his anthropology – the human being defined by the 'audibility' of the Word. See *DBWE* 1, 63n4.

<sup>44</sup> *DBWE* 1, 21; *DBW* 1, 13.

<sup>45</sup> This is emphasised in response to Peter Berger's criticism that Bonhoeffer does not provide a fruitful starting point for the dialogue between theology and the social sciences in Michael Mawson, 'Theology and Social Theory – Reevaluating Bonhoeffer's Approach', *Theology Today* 71 no. 1 (2014), 74.

<sup>46</sup> *DBWE* 2, 77n89; *DBW* 2, 71n89.

<sup>47</sup> Jörg Alfred Rades, 'Bonhoeffer and Hegel: from *Sanctorum Communio* to the Hegel Seminar with some Perspectives for the Later Works', Dissertation first draft and quotations [ca. 1983–1989] University of St. Andrews [UTS Archives, Bonhoeffer Secondary Papers, Series 2A Box 3], 7.

<sup>48</sup> Wüstenberg makes this point before offering a Hegelian reading of Bonhoeffer's movement between different philosophers. See Ralf Wüstenberg, 'Philosophical Influences on Bonhoeffer's "Religionless Christianity"', in *Bonhoeffer and Continental Thought*, ed. Brian Gregor and Jens Zimmermann (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 146.

This book characterises Bonhoeffer's reception of Hegel as both *eclectic* and *Christologically intent*.<sup>49</sup> The term 'eclectic' is used by Ferenc Lehel, a student in the 1933 Hegel seminar. Lehel relates that he was surprised by his teacher's posture, given anti-Idealist currents in theology.<sup>50</sup> He adds that Bonhoeffer read Hegel as an 'ecclesial theologian' who was not overawed by the system. Rather, Bonhoeffer was like an expert in the preservation of buildings, one who took more joy in the oldest, most valuable parts rather than registering his anger over its flaws.<sup>51</sup> Lehel's metaphor fits my earlier characterisation of Bonhoeffer's work as that of repair, not mere demolition. Preservation is not the work of a dilettante, and proper appreciation requires a good understanding of the entire structure. Along these lines, it is revealing to hear Bonhoeffer's response to one seminar student's proud conclusion that Hegel's *Philosophy of Religion* was not 'truly Christian': 'an author should not be attacked or interpreted from one of his negative sentences; we should ask what he intends with the whole book'.<sup>52</sup> Such counsel motivates the comparative expositions pursued in the chapters to follow. In other words, close readings of Hegel's texts are provided in order to appraise 'Bonhoeffer's Hegel'.

While Bonhoeffer led a seminar that sought to understand the 'whole book', he evidently felt the freedom to adopt a Hegelian term of art without importing its entire framework. At times he even sought to counter an overall trajectory in Hegel's work through his own distinctive recoveries, particularly in the area of Christological doctrine. Secure in his theological sources, Bonhoeffer advised his students to respond to Hegel with both *ja und nein*.<sup>53</sup> Such a free approach to Hegel bears comparison with Barth's own self-description years later: 'I myself have a certain weakness for Hegel and am always fond of doing a bit of "Hegeling". As Christians we have the freedom to do this.... I do it eclectically'.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> The combination of terms is inspired by Philip Ziegler, who claims that Bonhoeffer was 'ad hoc and tactical' in his use of philosophy. Philip Ziegler, 'Completely within God's Doing' (Lecture, Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer Conference, University of Aberdeen, December 12, 2014).

<sup>50</sup> Ferenc Lehel, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Hegelseminar: Nach Aufzeichnungen von Ferenc Lehel*, ed. Ilse Tödt (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1988), henceforth *HS*, 9–10.

<sup>51</sup> Lehel, *HS*, 10; cf. Rades, 'Bonhoeffer', 11.

<sup>52</sup> Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann and Ronald Smith, eds., *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (London: Collins, 1966), 65.

<sup>53</sup> The initial 'yes' is to the possibility of Christian knowledge of God, while the 'no' comes at the 'equation' of revelation and reason. Lehel, *HS*, 18.

<sup>54</sup> Barth also notes that he can adopt elements of Marxism without thereby being a Marxist. The remark was recorded in a conversation with pastors and lay people in September 1953; cited in *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, ed. Eberhard Busch, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1976), 387.