

G. W. F.

HEGEL

GREAT THINKERS

SHAO KAI TSENG

Foreword by Brant Bosserman

“William James amusingly noted that one side effect of nitrous oxide inhalation is increased understanding of Hegel’s philosophy. As fun as that sounds, I have a better suggestion: read this splendid book by Alex Tseng before diving into the German idealist’s profoundly difficult writings. I learned many new and useful things from Tseng’s well-informed exposition and analysis. Reformed readers will especially appreciate the discussion of how Bavinck, Vos, and Van Til ‘salvaged treasures from Hegel’s shipwreck,’ exposing the flawed foundations of his system while co-opting his common-grace insights to demonstrate the virtues of a Reformed Christian worldview.”

—**James N. Anderson**, Professor of Theology and
Philosophy, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte

“G. W. F. Hegel had an incalculable influence on the modern world. Whether faithfully or not, his philosophy was adopted by major thinkers as well as political activists throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His dictum that the rational alone is real was embodied in a progressive, organic view of history that culminates in an absolute state. China, Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, and even parts of American liberalism stand on this pillar. Shao Kai Tseng’s deeply learned account presents Hegel as an absolute realist whose views have found some echoes in Bavinck, Vos, Van Til, and even Schaeffer, and yet who is ultimately one of the great foes of biblical Christian faith. This series just keeps getting better and better.”

—**William Edgar**, Professor of Apologetics, Westminster
Theological Seminary

“Tseng’s introduction to Hegel achieves a remarkable balance of clarity, depth, and intellectual charity. He manages to present the essential features of Hegel’s thought in accessible and engaging terms (no small feat!), while resisting the temptation to

caricature. He combines these virtues with a rich grasp of theological history to help us appreciate how one of modern philosophy's most important thinkers has been, and continues to be, both a challenge and an inspiration to the Reformed Christian tradition. This book represents the best of the genre, and will be of interest to both student and teacher."

—**Ryan Kemp**, Assistant Professor of Philosophy,
Wheaton College

"Alex Tseng's book not only sets out a clear and reliable introduction to Hegel's thought but also makes clear why this is important to Christians—not least those who are inclined to view it with suspicion."

—**George Pattison**, 1640 Professor of Divinity, University
of Glasgow; Fellow, Max Weber Centre for Advanced
Research in Cultural and Social Studies

"In an era when nontheological and antimetaphysical readings of G. W. F. Hegel tend to dominate the scholarly scene, Shao Kai Tseng's concise and highly readable study contributes valuably to a resituation of Hegel in a theological light wherein he can be understood and assessed as he deserves to be. The explication of key themes in Hegel's absolute idealism is admirably lucid, and Tseng's 'Reformed assessment' successfully steers clear of any temptation to interpret Hegel in terms of 'friend or foe.' What's more, Tseng's exposition of the critical reception of Hegel by thinkers such as Herman Bavinck, Geerhardus Vos, Francis Schaeffer, and especially Cornelius Van Til might be particularly appreciated by readers interested in the Reformed tradition, but will prove valuable to anyone interested in genuinely theological assessments of Hegel. This is a welcome entry in historical theology and the history of philosophy."

—**Joel D. S. Rasmussen**, Mansfield College, University of
Oxford

“No great philosopher presents his readers with more formidable obstacles than Hegel. It is a pleasure, then, to be able to give Alex Tseng’s book a very warm welcome. Professor Tseng is an authoritative, approachable, engaged, and always fair-minded guide. The student coming to Hegel’s thought for the first time is in excellent hands.”

—**Michael E. Rosen**, Senator Joseph S. Clark Professor of Ethics in Politics and Government, Department of Government, Harvard University

“Alex Tseng’s brilliant introduction to Hegel betrays on every page the author’s impeccable grasp of his subject. Writing from the perspective of Reformed theology, Tseng makes a strong and plausible case for serious theological intellectual engagement with this uniquely influential thinker. Accessible and precise at the same time, the book is a highly rewarding read.”

—**Johannes Zachhuber**, Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology, University of Oxford, Faculty of Theology and Religion

Praise for the Great Thinkers Series

“After a long eclipse, intellectual history is back. We are becoming aware, once again, that ideas have consequences. The importance of P&R Publishing’s leadership in this trend cannot be overstated. The series Great Thinkers: Critical Studies of Minds That Shape Us is a tool that I wish I had possessed when I was in college and early in my ministry. The scholars examined in this well-chosen group have shaped our minds and habits more than we know. Though succinct, each volume is rich, and displays a balance between what Christians ought to value and what they ought to reject. This is one of the happiest publishing events in a long time.”

—**William Edgar**, Professor of Apologetics, Westminster Theological Seminary

“When I was beginning my studies of theology and philosophy during the 1950s and ’60s, I profited enormously from P&R’s Modern Thinkers Series. Here were relatively short books on important philosophers and theologians such as Nietzsche, Dewey, Van Til, Barth, and Bultmann, by scholars of Reformed conviction such as Clark, Van Riessen, Ridderbos, Polman, and Zuidema. These books did not merely summarize the work of these thinkers; they were serious critical interactions. Today, P&R is resuming and updating the series, now called Great Thinkers. The new books, on people such as Aquinas, Hume, Nietzsche, Derrida, and Foucault, are written by scholars who are experts on these writers. As before, these books are short—around 100 pages. They set forth accurately the views of the thinkers under consideration, and they enter into constructive dialogue, governed by biblical and Reformed convictions. I look forward to the release of all the books being planned and to the good influence they will have on the next generation of philosophers and theologians.”

—**John M. Frame**, Professor of Systematic Theology and
Philosophy Emeritus, Reformed Theological Seminary,
Orlando

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G. W. F.
HEGEL

Shao Kai Tseng



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In remembrance of *Yeye* and *Nainai*
who spoke God's Word to me and pointed me to Jesus Christ
who is the same yesterday and today and forever

Hebrews 13:7-8

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SERIES INTRODUCTION

Amid the rise and fall of nations and civilizations, the influence of a few great minds has been profound. Some of these remain relatively obscure, even as their thought shapes our world; others have become household names. As we engage our cultural and social contexts as ambassadors and witnesses for Christ, we must identify and test against the Word those thinkers who have so singularly formed the present age.

The Great Thinkers series is designed to meet the need for critically assessing the seminal thoughts of these thinkers. Great Thinkers hosts a colorful roster of authors analyzing primary source material against a background of historical contextual issues, and providing rich theological assessment and response from a Reformed perspective.

Each author was invited to meet a threefold goal, so that each Great Thinkers volume is, first, *academically informed*. The brevity of Great Thinkers volumes sets a premium on each author's command of the subject matter and on the secondary discussions that have shaped each thinker's influence. Our authors identify the most influential features of their thinkers'

work and address them with precision and insight. Second, the series maintains a high standard of *biblical and theological faithfulness*. Each volume stands on an epistemic commitment to “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27), and is thereby equipped for fruitful critical engagement. Finally, Great Thinkers texts are *accessible*, not burdened with jargon or unnecessarily difficult vocabulary. The goal is to inform and equip the reader as effectively as possible through clear writing, relevant analysis, and incisive, constructive critique. My hope is that this series will distinguish itself by striking with biblical faithfulness and the riches of the Reformed tradition at the central nerves of culture, cultural history, and intellectual heritage.

Bryce Craig, president of P&R Publishing, deserves hearty thanks for his initiative and encouragement in setting the series in motion and seeing it through. Many thanks as well to P&R’s director of academic development, John Hughes, who has assumed, with cool efficiency, nearly every role on the production side of each volume. The Rev. Mark Moser carried much of the burden in the initial design of the series, acquisitions, and editing of the first several volumes. And the expert participation of Amanda Martin, P&R’s editorial director, was essential at every turn. I have long admired P&R Publishing’s commitment, steadfast now for over eighty-five years, to publishing excellent books promoting biblical understanding and cultural awareness, especially in the area of Christian apologetics. Sincere thanks to P&R, to these fine brothers and sisters, and to several others not mentioned here for the opportunity to serve as editor of the Great Thinkers series.

Nathan D. Shannon
Seoul, Korea

FOREWORD

Big achievements may appear in small productions. A dialectician the likes of Hegel knew this very well. An achievement as profound as absolute knowing could, he believed, be communicated in religious representations such as the Trinity and incarnation, as confessed by well-catechized children. In developing what is perhaps the most complex and all-encompassing system of modernity, Hegel made all things turn on these basic Christian ideas, even succinctly summarizing his philosophy with an allusion to Christ's call to take up the cross: *Die to live*.

Why should it be, then, that confessional Reformed theologians have found in Hegel an adversary rather than an ally? The simple answer is that Hegel's interpretation of these classic Christian doctrines is in virtually every instance heretical. But this answer raises a more profound question: Is it possible that a Christian reader of Hegel might at the same time be driven to a sort of admiration and bewilderment by engagement with this towering thinker? To the former, for his having assigned a more central role, for example, to the Trinity than many Christian theologies; to the latter, for his having missed the genuine

significance of the orthodox doctrine so very errantly? And if so, how might one make positive use of Hegel's ideas without parting ways with Christian orthodoxy? In supplying significant answers to these sorts of questions, Alex Tseng's contribution to the Great Thinkers Series is itself a big achievement in a small production.

Not unlike Tseng, my interest in Hegel grew in conjunction with my study of the twentieth-century Reformed apologist Cornelius Van Til. Although he used Hegelian terms to describe his apologetic method, and gave passing summaries and critiques of Hegel's philosophy, I found myself frustrated that Van Til never provided a simple introduction to how he drew positive and negative inspiration from Hegel. Looking back, I believe a work like Tseng's would have significantly expedited my understanding of Van Til and his Reformed apologetic method. So I commend Tseng's volume to all those who would like to better understand an array of faithful Reformed theologians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

But I would hate to imply that the lone benefit to Hegel study is the way that it may render *other* thinkers more accessible, and merely to academic students of theology at that. The truth is that since my graduate studies and academic writing, I have worked in the capacity of church planter and minister of Trinitas Presbyterian Church (PCA), and my appreciation for Hegel has not waned but grown. In preaching the redemptive-historical significance of Scripture, encouraging believers with the central truths of the gospel, and admonishing Christ's sheep to live by his commands and to rely on the ordinary means of grace, I have pondered again and again the idea that the substance of my ministry is not at all like a set of discrete propositions. The biblical stories, doctrines, commands, sacraments, prayerful petitions, and so on do not simply sit comfortably side by side or stacked one upon the other like building blocks. In ways too

numerous to count and often difficult to perfectly describe, they fit together, work together, and grow out of one another—even when they may seem to conflict with one another. I feel a certain debt to Hegel for helping to sharpen my mind to reflect on the wonderful, surprising, and challenging connections within Christian truth.

And this state of affairs should not be wondered at. It is the Reformed theologian and pastor, after all, who believes that God has ordained all things to work together for his glory and for the good of his people. This confession commits us not only to reflect on how sin and tragedy will facilitate their opposite—the very glory of God—but to consider that a brilliant but tragically misguided thinker such as Hegel may have a positive hand in helping us to know and to love the living truth of our Savior. It is my sincere hope that this volume will lead many believers to appreciate Hegel in this fashion, even as they remain steadfast to a faithful Reformed confession.

Rev. Dr. Brant Bosserman
Minister, Trinitas Presbyterian Church
Mill Creek, Washington

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I would like to thank those who helped me in the process of writing this book. Nate Shannon has been a superb editor, not least because of his theological expertise. It has been a true delight working with John Hughes and the team at P&R Publishing. My buddy Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, always a source of theological inspiration for me, graciously nominated me for this project.

My reading of Hegel has been informed for the most part by my former mentors at Oxford: Professor Paul Fiddes, Professor George Pattison, Professor Joel Rasmussen, and Professor Johannes Zachhuber.

Daniel O'Connell and Peter Escalante kindly came to my aid when I needed research materials that were unavailable in China, where I wrote most of this book. Dan McDonald read through part of the manuscript and gave me helpful suggestions. My buddies Hong Liang and Thomas Coendet gave me authoritative literature on Hegel written in German to reassure me that I need not worry about possible criticism from Anglophone scholars who read Hegel in antitheological or antimetaphysical ways.

This book could not have been completed without the loving

support of my wife, Jasmine. I thank God for having enriched our married life with our dog Bobo, our lovely boy. He quietly kept me company in my study while I worked away on the manuscript, as if cheering me on, especially as I went through a somewhat emotional period.

My grandmother passed away during the composition of this book. She used to tell me bedside Bible stories when I was a boy. In the formative years of my childhood, both my parents went through an intellectual crisis of faith and temporarily stopped attending church. My grandparents were the ones who took me to church, prayed with me and for me, and “spoke the Word of God” to me. Now that they have both gone to be with the Lord—Christ desires to be with his people, as my friend Mark Jones loves to say—I would like to dedicate this book to them in remembrance of their spiritual leadership in my life as I continue to consider “the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith” (Heb. 13:7).

Soli Deo Gloria
Shanghai, China

1

WHY HEGEL MATTERS TODAY

Anecdote: From Hegel to Van Til and Vice Versa

During my freshman and sophomore years in college, I experienced an intellectual crisis of faith. God was still dear to my heart, as he always has been. Because no aspect of my life was of more fundamental importance than my very personal knowledge of God, I skipped many classes to visit the library, attempting to seek rational understanding of my own faith through philosophy. At that time, I attended a church in which most of the members, including the senior pastor, were intellectual elites from mainland China. The 1990s were a time when educated elites in communist or formerly communist countries began to give up faith in Marxism. Conversion to Christianity—be it theoretical, cultural, or personal—was a popular sort of “ideological turn to the right,” so to speak, for many Chinese intellectuals. Most of our church members were evidently born-again Christians, but embracing Kant and Hegel appeared to many of them, at least at the initial stages of faith, to be an integral part of their ideological right turn, along with their conversion to Christianity. Under the influence of that cultural milieu, I decided to begin

my philosophical quest with Kant and Hegel, picking up from the library *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

I was, of course, puzzled by these works, primarily because of their difficulty. The vocabularies seemed esoteric; the arguments were too complex to follow. During my first reading of these texts, I developed only some very general impressions of these two Teutonic philosophers: Kant asserts that as long as we act morally, we do not need to know what God did for us, while Hegel contends that religion is intrinsically alienating as it separates human beings from absolute spirit, because of its necessarily “representational” form (we shall unfold this notion in chapter 2). These were, of course, vague impressions, and at that time I was not yet aware that all thinkers undergo intellectual development. Yet in retrospect I would say that these impressions were more or less correct, though perhaps not sufficiently precise or comprehensive. These philosophical views implied that I did not need to take the Bible literally as the Word of God, that I did not have to believe in the historical veracity of the death and resurrection of my Lord Jesus, and that while going to church would make me a better person, only by studying philosophy would I become consistently wise and good.

These were, of course, not the kind of answers that I was seeking, for truths such as the authority of the Bible and the historicity of the virgin birth were beyond doubt for me. My main problems as a sophomore student in physics in 2000–2001 were largely the success of naturalistic assumptions in the natural sciences (i.e., why would a scientific system that denies the workings of the hand of God in nature be so coherent and successful in explaining the physical world?) and the problem of evil (i.e., if God is good and almighty, why does he allow so much evil?). Walking away from Kant and Hegel with little gain (though, in fact, there was much to gain from them, if only I had been

theologically and philosophically better equipped at the time), I devised my own theological explanations.

With much excitement, I presented this theology to my Campus Crusade leader, Dan MacDonald, a man of God who now serves as a Presbyterian (PCA) minister in Toronto. Dan told me that a long time ago someone named Pelagius had already come up with that theological explanation, and that it was deemed heretical. He invited me to walk with him to Regent College nearby, so that he could introduce to me the theology of John Calvin on our way. I was impressed by the theology he presented, so after we parted, I went to the Regent library and found a copy of Calvin's *Institutes*. Unlike my first encounter with Kant and Hegel, I understood the basic meaning of every sentence that Calvin wrote (though every time I revisited the *Institutes*, I would gain some new understandings). I finished my first reading of the *Institutes* almost in one breath, repeatedly shouting in my heart, "This man is explaining to me the God whom I have always known since I was a child!"

At that time, I thought I was done with Hegel for good. I began to acquaint myself with historic Reformed theologians, starting with the English Puritans of the seventeenth century, using J. I. Packer's introductory works. Eventually I made my way to modern Reformed theology, espoused variously by Old Princeton and Dutch neo-Calvinism. At that juncture, a friend who was studying at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia encouraged me to read Cornelius Van Til's *Defense of the Faith*.

Van Til gave me the confidence to engage in intellectual dialogue with non-Christian friends from the perspective of a Christian worldview. I picked up from Van Til an apologetic method that assumes the presuppositions of one's opponent's worldview, for argument's sake, in order to disclose their internal inconsistencies. In retrospect, I would say that my desire to debate with non-Christians in those days was driven more by

youthful pride and audacity than by the glory of God in the proclamation of hope (1 Peter 3:15). Even so, the Van Tilian method proved to be immensely useful in practice.

Towards the end of my undergraduate studies, a Christian friend who knew me as an avid defender of the faith introduced me to a classmate from her church who was having serious doubts about Christianity. I tried to use Van Til's conceptual apparatuses to resolve his doubts as the three of us took the same bus home. Our conversation attracted the attention of a stranger on the bus who happened to be a philosophy student from our own university.

"Are you talking about Hegel?" the stranger asked.

"No, we're talking about Van Til," I replied.

"Who is Van Til?"

"A Christian theologian and philosopher."

"He sure sounds like Hegel."

At that time, my impression of Hegel was too vague to draw the connections, but I would soon find out that Van Til had actually been accused of corrupting Christian theology with Hegelian idealism in the 1940s and 1950s. Such accusations, launched by J. Oliver Buswell and others, were of course prejudiced, but they were not completely without reason. Van Til's doctoral dissertation at Princeton University was specifically directed against British idealism, of which Hegel was the patriarch, so to speak. Yet Van Til's opposition to Hegelian idealism was not at all simplistic. As Timothy McConnell puts it, "Idealism provided Van Til a framework for problems to be dealt with, and thus provides a reference for understanding his apologetical approach."¹

As we proceed, we shall see more concretely how Van Til's apologetics—among other treasures of recent Reformed

1. Timothy McConnell, "The Influence of Idealism on the Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48 (2005): 558.

theology—is at once informed by the thought-form (*Denkform*) of Hegelian philosophy and opposed to the fundamental aspects of its ontology. Here Van Til serves as an example of how faithful Christian witness can benefit from critical appreciation of a philosophy that stands at odds with the presuppositions of biblical Christianity.

Hegel's Global Influence

Now the question is: in our own day and age, can we still benefit from a critical appreciation and charitable (though uncompromising) criticism of Hegel, like Van Til once did? There have been periods of time when Hegel's thought seemed to lose its contemporary relevance. The young Van Til lived in a time when British idealism was still a respected voice in the English-speaking world, and the influence of Hegel was felt within the culture. However, this philosophical movement, which began in the mid-nineteenth century, started to lose its cultural relevance in the early twentieth century. It faded into the background, with the rise of new philosophical traditions like analytic philosophy, existentialism, and logical positivism. Thus, McConnell suggests that Van Til's "usage of idealism . . . provides a potential limitation on the continuing applicability of certain aspects of . . . [his] apologetics."² The reason is that "by tailoring so much of his analysis to idealist philosophy, he lost his voice when his audience in the general culture changed to other forms of philosophy."³

However, history has shown us time and again that Hegel is one of those philosophers who keeps coming back, as it were, in different parts of the world in various circumstances. It is true

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, 587.

that in the first few decades of the twentieth century, Hegelian thought and Hegel studies in continental Europe were briefly overshadowed by existentialism and postmodernism. Soon, however, philosophers began to realize that without a firm grasp of Hegel's system, it was impossible to truly understand twentieth-century European philosophers like Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Jacques Derrida.⁴

Another occasion for the revival of Hegelian philosophy and Hegel studies in the mid-twentieth century was the rise of communist regimes around the globe. Marxist philosophers in the Soviet Union and continental Europe were quick to acknowledge Karl Marx's intellectual indebtedness to so-called Left Hegelianism, which turned Hegel's idealism into a materialistic and atheistic system. Ernst Bloch and other Marxist philosophers of the twentieth century gave rise to renewed interests in Hegel, aimed at reinterpreting him as one of the fountainheads of dialectical materialism.⁵

Ironically, the eventful year 1989 in communist states around the world, which led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, also spawned a new generation of Hegel scholars, both in the West and in countries like China. Western scholars of this generation tended to emphasize an *ad fontes* approach to Hegel's texts, allowing these texts to speak for themselves, without reading political agendas into them. In China, this new wave of academic interest in the German philosopher came with Deng Xiaoping's economic "reform and opening," which attempted to integrate right-wing ideologies of the West with Chinese communism. The events of 1989 meant for many Chinese intellectuals that Marxism had come to its dead end. Many of them

4. See Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

5. See Guy Planty-Bonjour, *The Categories of Dialectical Materialism: Contemporary Soviet Ontology* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1965).

went back to Hegel's texts to rediscover their implications for China's possible ideological turn to the right. So-called cultural Christians—scholars who appealed to Christianity as a way to reform Chinese culture without personal conversion—turned to Hegel, Kant, Max Weber, and others in their attempt to culturally “Christianize” Chinese society. It is worth mentioning here that the economic success of the “socialism with Chinese characteristics” program under the leaderships of Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping has led some of these scholars to “turn left” again and abandon the agenda of cultural Christianity. Others, however, gave up cultural Christianity to become born-again Christians, living as members of the visible body of Christ. As far as Hegel studies is concerned, China is starting to become a world leader in the Marxist camp of Hegel interpretation.⁶

The foregoing examples serve to demonstrate how multifaceted and sophisticated Hegel's philosophy is, such that it has been found deeply pertinent in so many different cultural-historical contexts. It is unlikely that it will become obsolete any time soon. For Christians and non-Christians alike, Hegel's writings will continue to be a source of both inspiration and challenge, in many different ways.

Hegel and Modern Theology

Another reason for Christians in particular to read Hegel has to do with his influence on modern theology, an area in which he stands as a towering figure. Virtually no major dogmatic theologian since the nineteenth century has been able to bypass him. The founder of modern liberal theology, Friedrich

6. This is reflected by the fact that the chapter on Marx and Hegel in *The Oxford Handbook of Hegel* is written by a home-grown Chinese scholar without education abroad. See Zhang Shuangli, “Marx and Hegel,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Hegel*, ed. Dean Moyar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Schleiermacher (1768–1834), once Hegel’s colleague at the University of Berlin, interacted intellectually with him at a profound level in a rather bitter rivalry.⁷ Albrecht Ritschl (1822–89), next in line to Schleiermacher in the liberal tradition of modern theology, rejected Hegel’s “speculative” metaphysics to embrace the “anti-metaphysical” approach of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804).⁸ The ghost of Hegel’s philosophy would continue to cast its shadow over the great anti-Hegelian Ritschlians, Wilhelm Herrmann (1846–1922) and Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930).⁹ David Friedrich Strauss (1808–74), a pioneer in historical-critical studies of the Bible, who was once associated with the so-called Young Hegelians, introduced Hegelian methods into modern biblical scholarship (see chapter 3 of this book). This Hegelian influence has been there to stay in the discipline, even if many biblical scholars today are unaware of it.

In twentieth-century biblical scholarship, this Hegelian legacy was carried on by Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976).¹⁰ Karl Barth (1886–1968) is another twentieth-century theologian who was deeply indebted to Hegel, and the precise role of his influence on Barth’s theology is an important ongoing debate in contemporary English-language Barth studies.¹¹ Among

7. See Shao Kai Tseng, “Church,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century Christian Thought*, ed. J. Rasmussen, J. Wolfe, and J. Zachhuber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 613–19.

8. See Joel Rasmussen, “The Transformation of Metaphysics,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century Christian Thought*, 22–25.

9. *Ibid.*, 24.

10. Bultmann’s critique of and indebtedness to Hegel was a topic that drew considerable scholarly attention in the 1970s. See, for example, J. C. O’Neill, “Bultmann and Hegel,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 2 (1970): 388–400; Kenley Dove, “Hegel and the Secularization Hypothesis,” in *The Legacy of Hegel: Proceedings of the Marquette Hegel Symposium 1970* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 146–47.

11. I engage with this debate and offer a summary of it in Shao Kai Tseng, *Karl Barth’s Infralapsarian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 216–23, 227–30, 258–59, 273–81.

living theologians, Jürgen Moltmann (born 1926) is one of the luminaries most often compared with Hegel, not least because Moltmann sees God as needing the world as an other in order to realize himself as God, and sees the transience and sufferings of the world as having ultimately arisen from the inner nature of God. R. Scott Rodin puts it well when he comments that Moltmann contends “along Hegelian lines that the creation of another reality outside of Himself was the only thing God could do in acting according to His own nature.”¹²

In conservative Reformed circles, the critical reception of the German philosopher in nineteenth-century Dutch Calvinism has been well documented (see chapter 3). Both Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) and Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) were avid readers of Hegel. They were staunchly opposed to the contents of his philosophy, to be sure, but they also made positive use of Hegelian methods for Reformed theology. One of Bavinck’s mentors in Leiden, Johannes Scholten (1811–85), even tried to incorporate Hegelian thought into the Reformed faith. In nineteenth-century America, Hegelian philosophy has also been an important lens through which Reformed theologians examined contemporary currents of thought and culture. The Old Princeton theologian Charles Hodge (1797–1878), for instance, analyzed the transcendentalist movement, influential in mid-nineteenth-century America, led by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82), in light of Hegel’s philosophy, criticizing the movement as “Hegelian to its core.”¹³

Of course, I am personally acquainted with quite a considerable number of people within the Reformed world who might say, “But we don’t care about modern theology,” or “Reformed

12. R. Scott Rodin, *Evil and Theodicy in the Theology of Karl Barth* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 79.

13. Paul Gutjahr, *Charles Hodge: Guardian of American Orthodoxy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 233.

orthodoxy is all we need,” or “Calvin and the Puritans are all we need.” My friend Mark Jones says these things sometimes, but only jokingly for the sake of emphasizing the importance of Puritan theology and Reformed orthodoxy for contemporary Christianity. At a Hong Kong conference celebrating the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation in the summer of 2017, where Mark and I were both keynote speakers, he emphatically reminded the Chinese Reformed audience of the breadth of reading that the Puritans exemplified: they drew from both Christian and non-Christian, orthodox and heterodox, sources.

We need not be reminded of Calvin’s lengthy refutation of Osiander, in which Calvin actually recognizes the importance of some of the heretic’s insights and his criticisms of the Lutheran doctrine of justification. The positive uses of Aristotle’s philosophy in both Calvin and later Reformed orthodoxy is another example. Or how about Gisbertus Voetius’s (1634–93) famous controversy with Descartes, and the more positive uses of Cartesian philosophy in the theology of Herman Witsius (1636–1708)? We could also mention Jonathan Edwards’s (1703–58) critical appropriation of the empiricist terminology of the English philosopher John Locke (1632–1704), as well as his demonstrated familiarity with the writings of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), Isaac Newton (1643–1727), Joseph Addison (1672–1719), Joseph Butler (1692–1752), David Hume (1711–76), and many others.

Reformed theology in a vacuum is not historic Reformed theology. Historically, Reformed theology has always stood at the frontiers of culture, interacting with contemporary thought, be it theology, philosophy, or other disciplines. And because Hegel’s influence has been so immense, profound, widespread, and multifaceted up to our own day, the importance of reading him cannot be overstated. Just the fact that Hegel’s philosophy casts a shadow over modern theology should be sufficient reason for us to give him a read.

Features of This Book

Before proceeding to the main contents of this book, it would be helpful for the reader to understand the rationale behind the way I have structured the themes and materials I have chosen to cover. The basic motive is this: Hegel is very difficult to read, and I intend to try my best to make his writings manageable for the reader. After finishing this book, the reader should be able to approach Hegel's primary texts with confidence. To that end I have devised several features for the rest of the book, especially chapter 2:

1. Technical vocabularies defined: All the key terms of Hegel's technical writings and the relevant history of philosophy are highlighted with boldface letters in places of the text where succinct definitions are offered. These include terms like **rationalism**, **empiricism**, **transcendental idealism**, **absolute idealism**, and **speculative method**.
2. Historical overview: Hegel's philosophy focuses on the history of philosophy, and it is impossible to understand him without a basic knowledge of that history. At the beginning of chapter 2, I offer a brief account of the history of modern philosophy that finds its roots in classical Greece. This is meant to ensure that even readers who have little knowledge of the history of philosophy will be able to follow the rest of chapter 2.
3. Emphasis on method: Given the prescribed length of this book, it is impossible to cover all major areas of Hegel's philosophy in sufficient depth. Fortunately, Hegel is one of those philosophers whose method is said to be "identical" (we shall see what this means later) with his content. An outline of Hegel's philosophical method will give us

an understanding of the basic contours of his philosophy. This is intended to provide the reader with a map with which to steer through the convoluted material in Hegel's primary texts later, should the reader decide to pursue further studies of the philosopher's thought.

4. Analogies and metaphors: Hegel himself is fond of using lively and concrete metaphors and analogies to explain his rather difficult ideas. This book places an emphasis on this approach in order to make his philosophy more accessible to readers less familiar with the academic discipline.
5. Selective use of direct quotations from primary sources: A dilemma in writing an introductory volume on Hegel has to do with the use of primary sources. On the one hand, direct quotations are necessary in helping the reader gain a taste of the original Hegel. On the other hand, Hegel's writings are infamously hard to follow. The solution that this book has adopted is to limit direct quotations to those parts of Hegel's writings that are plain and relatively easy to read. In particular, quotations from the *Phenomenology* are taken from the translation by James Baillie (titled *The Phenomenology of Mind*). While this translation would not have been the choice for a work of scholarly research, the terms and phrases in this classic edition are dear to readers of Hegel, just as the King James Version is to English Bible readers. My hope is that through these direct quotations from Baillie's translation, the reader will come to feel the vibe of the English-language Hegel studies community, as it were.

As a last word before we proceed, let us remember that Hegel is a difficult writer with a style that is often unclear, and his works have been subjected to many different interpretations. It is true that his philosophy is antithetical to the biblical worldviews as

understood by historic Reformed theology. However, we must also be careful not to misrepresent his thought. I shall try my best to offer an exegesis of his writings that is least controverted among Hegel scholars, even though it is inevitable that I will choose one interpretational model rather than another when it comes to certain issues. I am of the conviction that the most edifying way for Christians to engage with Hegel is one that is both critical and fair.