

Paul in the Grip of Continental Philosophers

What is at Stake?

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Pauline scholars, theologians, philosophers, historians, Christians—really all persons who have an interest in the apostle Paul—find themselves in the same basic quandary: How to make sense of this man Paul, how to interpret and understand his teaching, and how to determine its significance, then and now? In other words, the reader of Pauline texts is confronted with the perennial hermeneutical question. To be sure, the hermeneutical circle is indeed wide, complex, and multifarious; but there are two basic presuppositions that Paul’s interpreters have in common. The first and basic one is that the starting point of an encounter with Paul is the reading of his letters and the attempt to interpret and understand them. In our postmodern context, this once basic proposition—that Paul is an author and that we encounter him through his texts—is now questioned in itself; we will return to this question below. The second presupposition is the fact that each reader has a unique *Sitz im Leben* within which she or he must make sense of Paul. In other words, the contextual location of each Pauline reader is distinct from the location of other Pauline readers. Correspondingly, the presuppositions—though as Gadamer has shown, they are actually “prejudices”¹ and not mere neutral prerequisites—that each interpreter of Paul brings to the text are equally distinct. This is the case not only in terms of social location but also in terms of time. The Pauline interpretations of Augustine, Luther, Bultmann, Barth, or Tillich are evidently different from our own today. They are removed both in time² and in social, intellectual location. Our cognizance of these differences should keep us from committing the error of anachronism and open our eyes to the plurality of contexts. Examining how the philosophical interest in Paul developed and

1. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 5th ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1986), 270–95.

2. *Ibid.*, 296–305.

how, in this very development, the hermeneutical locations and presuppositions (necessarily and sometimes dramatically) changed will place us in a better position to make intelligible Continental philosophy's interest in, if not fascination with, Paul.

THE FIRST PHILOSOPHY AND CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

Let us start at the beginning of what we now call the Western intellectual tradition. Here theology and philosophy were more or less compatible friends. Even before Paul had penned one word of his letters, Greek thinkers had already tried to work out a fruitful relationship between theology and philosophy. It was Aristotle—and not a Christian theologian—who introduced the word θεολογία (“theology”) into the intellectual discourse of the Occident. He understood theology as the “first philosophy” (πρώτη φιλοσοφία) by virtue of its reflecting on first causes and their Being, ideas that led him to the concept of God.³ The Greek interweaving of theology and philosophy was taken up in both the Jewish and Christian traditions. The prime example of an early Jewish thinker who embraced the relation between philosophy and theology in positive terms is Philo of Alexandria. As a thinker committed to both the observing of Torah and a Middle-Platonic philosophical outlook, he saw no inherent conflict in employing philosophy as “the handmaid” of theology. In other words, for Philo, philosophical reflection strengthened his theology and made his faith more intelligible to the non-Jewish reader.⁴

When we come to the apostle himself, his own letters and the account of his life in the book of Acts give a rather meager portrait of Paul as a philosopher, or as an apostle interested in philosophical themes. Even though Paul invokes the Stoic Aratus (see *Phaenomena* 5) in his speech in Athens (see Acts 17:28), it seems fair to say that he does so for apologetic and theological reasons rather than for the sake of philosophical discourse. Luke comments that both Stoics and Epicureans were not very impressed with him, most likely because Paul argued for the resurrection of the dead.⁵ In the Christian tradition, the interest in the relation between theology and philosophy emerged only after Paul. Thinkers such as Tertullian, Justin Martyr, Origen, the Greek

3. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1026a, 1064b, 983a.

4. For Philo's attempt to work out a coherent synthesis between Judaism and Middle Platonism, see my study *Divine Providence in Philo of Alexandria*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 77 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999).

5. For a positive assessment of Paul's affinity with Greek thought, see Troels Engberg-Pederson, ed., *Paul in His Hellenistic Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); and Abraham J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989).

fathers, Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Aquinas, Luther, and a host of other thinkers found it nearly impossible to do theology without paying at least a minimal tribute to the influence of philosophy. This is not to claim that all these thinkers enthusiastically embraced philosophy. Tertullian and Luther, for example, did not conceal that they had little use for Greek thought. For Luther, Scripture—including Paul’s letters—must be interpreted within the framework of *sola scriptura*, apart from an additional philosophical framework. He therefore made no bones about his distaste for Aristotelian philosophy. By the time of the Reformation, the debate on the relation of theology and philosophy, often couched in the metaphor “Jerusalem versus Athens,” was sometimes more divisive for theology than it was unifying.

THE MODERN PERIOD

The next stage of theological–philosophical discourse was the epoch of the modern period. Here we are in the unusual position to demarcate that period by precisely two hundred years: from 1789 to 1989, respectively the fall of La Bastille in Paris and the fall of the Berlin Wall. At the beginning stands the French Revolution, with its program that we today summarize as basic human rights. Not incidentally, the beginning of modernity is also characterized by the definition of “Enlightenment,” as in the essays of Mendelssohn and, most famously, Kant. It seems to me that the Enlightenment period arguably has had the most profound philosophical influence on theology. Almost all of the Continental philosophers—Kant, Mendelssohn, Spinoza, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Feuerbach, Nietzsche, Fichte, and Heidegger, to name a few—challenged theology to such an extent that theology, at least in the academy, was not able to ignore philosophy’s demands on it. Philosophy’s rigorous and relentless questioning of theology’s ontological and epistemological premises inevitably led to large fissures and cracks in many theological systems. At the end of the modern period, it was nearly customary to declare the demise of theology and the end of metaphysics.⁶ The crisis in theology brought about by Enlightenment philosophies opened up the door, however, for theology’s reflection on its own presuppositions of interpretation. Schleiermacher’s inaugurating of what we now refer to as the discipline of hermeneutics was definitely a crucial milestone in theology’s reconception and clarification of its own foundation and tasks. The interrelatedness of theology and philosophy in

6. See, for example, Theodor W. Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concepts and Problems*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); and Timothy Stanley, *Protestant Metaphysics after Karl Barth and Martin Heidegger* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010).

the sphere of hermeneutics can be seen now, for example, in the fact that no serious hermeneutical reflection by any theology can do so today apart from reference to Gadamer and many others engaged in the field of hermeneutics. We now return to the theme of hermeneutics and Continental philosophy.

POSTMODERN THOUGHT AFTER THE BERLIN WALL

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 left a tremor felt in every corner of the globe. The demise of that wall actually signifies the enormous unhinging of one ideology (Cold War Communism) and with it the parousia of a new, apparently incontestable ideology (neoliberal capitalism). Indeed, as is well known, Francis Fukuyama announced that the fall of the Berlin Wall signified “the end of history.”⁷ By that he did not mean that a particular epoch in history had come to an end (Communism), but rather that humanity as a whole had reached a kind of an end point, ideologically and economically. Ideologically, the only political alternative for all the world was now liberal democracy, and economically, the only viable economic system was that of free-market capitalism (American style). Fukuyama (who studied under Allan Bloom, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Derrida) later revised and modified his views, essentially distancing himself from the neoconservatism of the Bush administration.⁸

Nonetheless, the sentiment that Fukuyama initially expressed after the fall of the Berlin Wall is noteworthy because it serves as a foil to making intelligible—at least in part—the interest and context of Continental philosophy in the apostle Paul. In short, for most of the contemporary philosophers, interest in Paul stems from the fact that they see in him, more or less, an ally in their attempt to deconstruct a world that accords with neoliberal political and economic policies in the new post-Berlin Wall era. Some of the philosophers discussed in this volume have expressed their own underlying philosophical and ideological assumptions openly; others have been more hesitant to articulate them candidly and upfront. Alain Badiou, for example, has no inhibition to declare his Marxism openly, while Walter Benjamin—given the imminent danger of the Nazi regime—gave more hints than insights into his own political views. Common to all postmodern thinkers, not only the ones discussed in the essays below but also a host of others, is the conviction that our contemporary

7. See the book by the same title, Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

8. See, for example, Francis Fukuyama, *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order* (New York: Free Press, 1999); *America at the Crossroads* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); *Our Posthuman Future* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2002).

world is dominated, exploited, and threatened by power structures that breed injustice, inequality, poverty, and reinforce many of the “isms” that devalue human lives individually and collectively. The collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe has opened the floodgates for neoliberal governments and their accomplices in the corporate world (often these become one, as in the case of the Bush administration)⁹ to now spread their propaganda and force their (violent) action on many parts of the globe.

The apparent nonexistence of other viable political and economic alternatives has prompted a large number of contemporary European (and, increasingly, non-European) philosophers to expose and deconstruct these neoliberal structures and the apparatuses that support them. Accordingly, postmodern philosophy is always poststructuralist to the extent that philosophic discourse aims at the demise of the structures that enslave humanity. The starting point of many Continental philosophers, namely, the critique of the vestiges of bourgeois hegemony, is thus to be affirmed by any person who is not blind to the realities of our world.

AN UNFORTUNATE DICHOTOMY: LEFT VERSUS RIGHT

Many readers on “the right” may immediately think, however, that Continental philosophy’s critique of neoliberal policies is the approach “of the left.” While “the left” may have good intentions, such a response continues, it nonetheless misses the mark, because the real predicament of humanity is not the global enslavement brought about by greedy politicians and corporations but the enslavement of the person to the power of sin. This bipolarity of “left” and “right” is in itself a structure that makes genuine dialogue nearly impossible. While labels do have a certain function, namely, to act as a cipher for underlying ideological premises, in our current discussion on Paul, it would be advisable to set them aside. Here is the reason, or more modestly, the attempt to suggest a reason, why students of Paul should give a fair hearing to Continental philosophy vis-à-vis the apostle.

The left-versus-right dichotomy is ineffectual and mostly precludes genuine understanding between the two, exceptions notwithstanding. The “right” needs to listen to the “left” because the left has very clearly discerned that this world is in need of healing. It is wounded by powerful structures that are all too often associated with the name of Christ whom Paul proclaimed. The Pauline message that is meant to be “the good news” has in reality become

9. A brilliant analysis of the Bush era and its political perversion for economic gain is Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2008).

the news unto oppression and death. Suffice it here to point to the history of Latin America during the last five hundred years, the history of slavery, and the marginalization of women and persons of color. In other words—and as the essay by Neil Elliott at the end of this book makes abundantly clear—the task of identifying human injustice, suffering, and oppression should have been an integral part of the message and action of the Christian church from the moment the apostle to the Gentiles had started to preach the gospel of the risen Christ.

This dichotomy of “left” and “right” is, then, in my view both unfortunate and unnecessary: those on the “left” and the “right” both equally and correctly discern that our world is fundamentally and substantially hurt by injustice. For the former, the answer and the core of this human plight is the preaching of the good news of the risen Messiah by means of the message proclaimed by Paul (personal salvation); for the latter, it is critique and the call for the demise of imperial structures that continue the oppression of the masses by the powerful few (social liberation). If this analysis, however sketchy it is here, is correct, then it follows that both—“left” and “right”—must concede that they possess only a partial truth. Those who wish, as I do, not to downplay the core of Pauline theology and whose objective it is to proclaim good news as a message of personal *and* social liberation can do so only by drawing on the sociological analysis and insights of those who dare to name the evil in our world. Put differently, the student of Paul is not faced with an either/or decision: *either* accept Pauline theology and dismiss the insights and challenges of Continental philosophy *or* embrace Continental philosophy’s critique of structural oppression but give up Pauline theology. To express it in the most condensed manner: the one gospel of Jesus Christ announces at the same time the message of liberation for the individual human believer *and* for human communities who suffer injustice and oppression. As a case in point, a movement that has sought to achieve this kind of synthesis of “orthodoxy” and “orthopraxis” is liberation theology. To pit one against the other is a fundamental mistake that goes against the claims of gospel itself. If it is indeed the case that “faith without works is dead,” then the artificial dichotomy of “left” versus “right,” based on a divisive political fault line, should be given up by Pauline scholars, theologians, and, ideally, all Christians.

THE GREAT HERMENEUTICAL SHIFT

I am not suggesting that a student of Paul, or a biblical scholar or theologian for that matter, can uncritically take over the underlying assumptions of

Continental philosophy without considering the monumental shift in hermeneutics. What is this shift? In nuce, it is this: from the beginning to about the end of the modern period, theological thinking was predicated on a specific hermeneutical assumption, namely, that philosophical thinking will clarify and make more coherent theology's own self-understanding. In relation to Paul, the starting point was the Pauline corpus; theology and philosophy were both employed in tandem to make the meaning of the Pauline letters intelligible. Theology was the queen of the interpretive undertaking and philosophy the handmaid. A good illustration of this dynamic is found in the work of Bultmann and Tillich. By maintaining constant, fruitful dialogue with Heidegger, Bultmann's theology, for example, was shaped by the Heidegger's existential philosophy, albeit in such a way that Bultmann did not forfeit the primacy of theology in favor of philosophy; the latter served as a significant tool to sharpen the former.

But in Continental philosophy, the hermeneutic baseline is the reverse. Some contemporary philosophers, such as Badiou, have no interest in the theology of Paul and, indeed, care absolutely nothing about the good news of the risen Messiah. Their interest in Paul lies outside of the message of Paul, outside his letters, and thereby outside the Scriptures and the demands they make on the Christian. Badiou, for example (as most others as well), already has a philosophy, an ideological system of his own. Their starting point is their own philosophy, and not the Pauline corpus. In their philosophizing, they need Pauline thought only to the extent that it corroborates ideas already articulated in their systems of thought. This applies more or less to all the Continental philosophers. They are not pursuing Pauline studies because they want to discover Pauline theology or how Paul's thought shapes the Christian church. Quite to the contrary, they use Paul as if his thought is a quarry from which they can pick up a few useful stones for their own ideological buildings.

The great hermeneutic reversal can thus be described in these terms: On the one hand, the vast majority of theologians employ philosophy in order to interpret and understand Paul's letters, and correspondingly his theology. They treat Paul as an author and his texts as legitimate sources for speaking about objective realities; they begin with Paul. On the other hand, contemporary philosophers interested in Pauline thought do not begin with Paul and his texts. They have their own ideological structures and therefore employ Paul in the service of those structures. They also do not substantially use theology to clarify their philosophy; the former is hardly ever the handmaid of the latter. What should the student of Paul make of this reversal?

THE DEATH OF THE (OTHER) AUTHOR?

My main critique of Continental philosophy's appropriation of Paul in the name of deconstructing the structural evils of the world is the unavoidable deconstruction of Paul as the "other." To be fair, this critique does not apply equally to all Continental philosophers. And yet, Postmodern thought is predicated—rightfully so—on the recovery of the person who is unlike "us," or in academic jargon, the "other." Readings of history and the contemporary social-political scene are rewritten from the perspective of the marginalized and oppressed, or as Bonhoeffer said, long before liberation theologies and postmodern thought picked up the expression, "from below." In his own words, world history needs to be recast "from the perspective of the outcasts, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed and reviled, in short from the perspective of the suffering."¹⁰ Another way of expressing the reversal of the voices of world history is to give the "other" his or her voice. As long as the powerful speak on behalf of the "voiceless," the reversal cannot happen. And this is precisely the paradox between Paul and his Continental admirers. Continental philosophy uses the voice of Paul, but does not always give him his own voice. Continental philosophy changes the voice of Paul to say things that Paul may not have been willing to say. In terminology that comes from the pens of Continental thinkers themselves, it seems to me that Paul has suffered "the death of the author."

The idea of the death of the author is the brainchild of Roland Barthes.¹¹ He suggests that there is in fact no such thing as an "author" and correspondingly no such a thing as a "text." Here, then, is the dilemma for me. Inadvertently, perhaps, but nonetheless ironically, the death or suspension of the author seems to me unavoidably "a murdering" of a person. Erasing an author—and this is to some extent what some of the thinkers examined in these essays cannot avoid—is a kind of taking hostage of the author-person, in our case the life and teaching of Paul.¹² In the words of Emmanuel Levinas: the grandeur of modern antihumanism (his term) "consists in making a clear space for the hostage-subjectivity by sweeping away the notion of the person."¹³ The irony lies precisely in the fact that Continental philosophy has, to its credit, created a significant space for "the other." There can be no doubt that Barthes

10. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 8, trans. Isabel Best et al., ed. John W. de Gruchy (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 52.

11. See Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text* (Glasgow: Fontana 1977), 142–48.

12. Cf. Seán Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author. Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, third edition 2008).

and Foucault wanted to open up new and hitherto unexplored spaces for the other precisely by suspending the idea of author. And yet, is the very space those postmodern thinkers want to open up—namely, more freedom, recognition, and space for being the other—vitiating by the death of the author? In other words, does the death of the author turn out also to be the death of the other? For how is it possible to suspend the notion that Paul is an author without not also suspending the notion that he is our other? There is no point in explaining away Paul's alterity vis-à-vis Continental philosophy's systems. All the more, then, the retrieval of alterity hinges precisely on permitting the other to speak and be heard as the other. There is no such thing as a "dead other." Is it not then the case, to push even further, that an author (irrespective of how much *I* (dis)like him or her, even if the other is my enemy) is always and necessarily the other? The consequence of the dismissal of the other in the death of the author opens up a wide margin for misuse. If Paul is not really the "other" as the "author," then it is an easy step to create him in one's preferred image, either as traditional *Saulus judaicus*, or as *Paulus theologicus*, or a *Paulus philosophicus* or, today, as the newly celebrated *Paulus politicus*.

CRITICAL AND CONSTRUCTIVE APPRAISAL

Since the essays in this book are directed at students of Paul and those who are curious about the nature and intent of Continental philosophy's attention to Paul, I would like to conclude with four summative comments that are meant to put into perspective the questions I have raised above and also provide some further pointers for intellectual engagement.

1. The history of the relation between theology and philosophy sketched above is necessarily incomplete. The main function is to show that the emphasis of that relation has changed fundamentally. Throughout much of Western history, theology employed philosophy in order to clarify its own positions with greater coherence, but the focus of that dialogue was, more or less, on theology itself. The collapse of the Berlin Wall symbolized a dramatic shift, however—namely, the apparent triumph of unrestrained capitalism, against which philosophers on the Continent reacted with reinvigorated social and philosophical analysis. In other words, the concrete, actual human situation, and not an abstract new philosophical idea, became the starting point for

13. Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, translated by Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 182. For an excellent discussion of Levinas from the point of philosophical hermeneutics, cf. Jens Zimmermann, *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics. An Incarnational-Trinitarian Theory of Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics 2004), 187–229.

their philosophizing. To put it differently, Continental philosophers did not begin (or more accurately, did not exclusively begin) their deliberations with a theoretical analysis of economic systems and only then observe the new danger for human suffering because of the announcement of the triumph of capitalism.¹⁴ To the vexing surprise—or annoyance—of many a Pauline interpreter, the apostle became part of the philosophical solution.

2. Dialogue that leads to understanding requires that both the Pauline interpreter and the Continental philosopher openly acknowledge their respective hermeneutical prejudices and presuppositions. The Pauline scholar and the philosopher are both equally called to a hermeneutically self-conscious reading of Paul. It is not enough simply to make claims on Paul, be they of a biblical-theological or social-philosophical nature. Both have to account for their positions in an intellectually responsible manner. The philosopher has to accept the question of whether a reduction of the apostle to a *Paulus politicus* is nothing but a redeployment and reconceptualization of basic Pauline words and symbols. Is such an exercise in the end nothing but a fancied and intellectualized emptying of these symbols, stripping them of substance and content? The Pauline interpreter, however, must ask whether the claim that Paul is purely a *Paulus theologicus* does not also amount to putting a straitjacket on the apostle that suffocates his message of liberation at the roots. Is it not also an illicit reduction of the gospel the apostle preached when the social, political, and existential questions undoubtedly addressed or implicated in his letters are brushed off as if they merely concern a “few liberals”? Expressed differently, both Pauline theologians and Continental philosophers must be cognizant of the boundary lines their hermeneutical frameworks and prejudices entail.

3. But who can demarcate such boundary lines, and who is presumptuous enough to be the judge? The answer, in short, is implicated in the core conceptions of both the Pauline message and Continental philosophy. In the former, it is the message of unconditional love (ἀγάπη). In the words of Paul, ἡ ἀγάπη ἀνυπόκριτος (Rom. 12:9), ἡ ἀγάπη τῷ πλησίον κακὸν οὐκ ἐργάζεται· πλήρωμα οὖν νόμου ἡ ἀγάπη (Rom. 13:10), πάντα ὑμῶν ἐν ἀγάπῃ γινέσθω (1 Cor. 16:24), to which, of course, we may add 1 Corinthians 13.¹⁵ Paul’s view of love as an unconditional power by which the neighbor must be approached is paralleled in contemporary philosophy in the notion of the “other.”

14. In the history of theology, the most obvious attempt to correlate the actual human situation of suffering and poverty with a social (Marxist) analysis and the gospel of Jesus Christ was the phenomenon of Latin American liberation theology. For details, see the works by Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff, Jon Sobrino, and many others.

Suffice it here to say that again both the Continental philosopher and the Pauline scholar must ask themselves whether their respective hermeneutical prejudices and presuppositions lead de facto to a violation of the love of neighbor or the suspension of the other. There is no doubt that both—philosopher and theologian—desire that their thinking be a conduit toward life: The former envisions a *real and fulfilling life here on earth* for the oppressed and exploited masses of the poor; the latter assigns priority to an *eternal life*. This division is not to be seen as absolute, but merely as the indicator of priority in the respective forms of thinking for the philosopher and theologian.

In view of life, then, the theologian must be mindful of the fact that Jesus Christ did not live and was not resurrected for a *theology* but for the sake of *life* itself. And this is precisely the challenge of the neighbor, the other, including the enemy. Because the Christian interpreter of Paul has no direct, unmediated, soul-to-soul claim on any other person,¹⁶ and because the path of grace is nothing but a divine mystery, it follows that no Christian person has the right to hold hostage another person, the other, with the gospel. In Bonhoeffer's words, "I must release others from all my attempts to control, coerce, and dominate them with my love."¹⁷ In other words, even the very best of (Christian) intentions may end up violating the neighbor in a move that goes against the very core of Jesus' and Paul's message.

In view of life, the philosopher must be equally mindful of the fact that the suspension of the other is nothing but the destruction of *life*, even if only the life of one person. If our suspicion, that the suspension of the author inevitably entails the death of the other, is correct, then it follows that the Continental philosopher faces a dilemma. Is it legitimate to suspend the author-other of Paul in order to employ his thought as a building block for one's own ideology or philosophy? This critique works only on the assumption that the philosophers have, in fact, misunderstood or (deliberately) misappropriated Paul's thought for their own ends. (To repeat, this does not apply equally across the spectrum of Continental thought.) Nonetheless, I take it that some of the philosophers do

15. In my view, the most theologically penetrating and psychologically freeing reflection of what unconditional love of the other means is that of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 5, trans. D. W. Bloesch and J. H. Burnett, ed. Geoffrey Kelly (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 27–47. On Bonhoeffer's correlation of theology and philosophy, see also Peter Frick, ed., *Bonhoeffer's Intellectual Formation: Theology and Philosophy in His Thought*, Religion in Philosophy and Theology 29 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

16. See Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 31, 33, 41, 43–44.

17. *Ibid.*, 44.

agree that their interpretations of Paul are idiosyncratic, at least to the extent that these have nothing to do with a traditional, theological exegesis. Is this kind of appropriation already a violation of the face of the other (Levinas)?

Without presuming to be the judge in this matter, there seems to me a test case that every author can apply to his or her writing. The question is this: How would I respond if my writings were being (mis)used in ways that clearly went against the grain of my intentions? (I do not believe that we write without intentions.) What if, hypothetically (and somewhat absurdly) speaking, future generations would use our very own writings to substantiate ideas and thoughts that would be employed in the service of ideologies we ourselves radically oppose? What if, for example, the corpus of Continental philosophy would one day be discovered as the ideal framework for the ideas of incumbent tyrants, oppressive systems, or intellectual jihadists of all sorts of propaganda that the authors of the philosophical corpus would today vehemently reject? In that case, I presume, the philosophers and we ourselves would insist—rightfully so—on being respected as an author and “other.” I do not want to push this comparison too far. But I do want to bring into focus that the question of author and the other is often given little bearing on my discourse until I myself am implicated in its suspension.

Let us return to Paul. The question is whether a purely theological-exegetical reading of Paul and, likewise, a purely political-philosophical reading of Paul are not, more or less, readings that equally suspend Paul as author and other. Since the suspension of a person, even if only metaphorically in relation to a writing, entails some kind of subtraction of life and the disallowance of Being, both are faced with the same challenge: Do their purported theologies and philosophies actually contribute to life, individually and collectively, without at the same time destroying the life of the other? The reader must herself or himself find a path through this complex reality.

4. The purpose of the essays in this volume is to help the student of Paul find an orientation in this vast, complex, and often overwhelming discourse on the apostle vis-à-vis Continental philosophy. With the exception of the last essay, the task of each contributor is to focus on one of the Continental philosophers or their forerunners in such a way that the significance of each philosopher is made relevant in relation to the apostle Paul. Given the intricate nature of this discourse, it goes without saying that this volume as a whole does not presume to present a final analysis or conclusion with regard either to one of the philosophers or to the debate as a whole; rather, this work seeks to function as an invitation and stimulus to pursue this debate in greater detail. Moreover, the essays in this collection are not uniform to the extent that the contributors

share an overarching and unifying position, let alone a consensus, on either Paul or Continental philosophy or the relationship between the two. Just as each author can only speak for himself in these essays,¹⁸ the reader too must form and articulate his or her opinion in dialogue with the apostle Paul, with the Continental philosophers, and with the interpreters speaking in this collection.

18. As editor, I have made a sustained and repeated—but ultimately unsuccessful—attempt to recruit female scholars to participate in this project, not because this is the politically correct step to take, but, in the spirit of these reflections, to be genuinely enriched by the voice of an other. Nonetheless, it is my hope that the voice of women will be heard in this discourse, perhaps as a response to some of the essays presented here.