1 Types of Approaches to Holocaust Suffering

Practical Responses as Alternatives to Theodicy

THE TOPIC OF EVIL has been widely discussed in academic as well as popular venues in North America and Europe over the course of the twentieth century. One reason for sustained attention to evil lies in the social and political circumstances of recent history. Contemporary consciousness of evil centers around actual events of massive death and destruction that are seared into the collective cultural memory. In particular, World War I (1914–1918) and World War II (1939–1945) are historic landmarks that are influential in shaping reflection on evil and suffering. The First World War represents massive death and destruction, impacting millions of individuals and many nations. It displayed the inhumanity of purportedly "civilized" persons in the indiscriminate slaughter of artillery bombardment, trench warfare, and the gruesome deaths caused by chemical gas. The Great War was a catalyst for widespread loss of confidence in the modern philosophical and scientific ideas of progress, as well as the moral fiber of political institutions and individuals. The Second World War served to confirm and further intensify awareness of the potential of Western nations for horrendous destructiveness and inhumanity. The name "Auschwitz" has become a symbol for memories of mass-death, the dark side of technological progress, moral failure to help victims of Nazi prejudice, and the misuse of bureaucratic efficiency as a tool of genocide. The testimonies of those who have suffered, particularly victims of the Holocaust, have played a prominent role in contemporary Jewish and Christian reflection on evil.[1] But the horrors of war and genocide are not the only focal points for such reflection. Attention is also given to issues of economic justice and the suffering of citizens of poor nations,

and to cases of social oppression, based on racial, ethnic, or gender prejudice, that occur in both affluent and underdeveloped countries. Another category of suffering that deserves mention is suffering randomly distributed among all population groups and classes, where individuals are victims of disease, crime, abusive treatment, natural disasters, or accidents of various kinds.

Depending on a person's national, social, geographical, and political situation, different instances of suffering are attended to as paradigmatic horrors. For example, during the last few decades many European and North American scholars, mainly Jewish and Christian thinkers, have focused on the Holocaust as a pivotal example of the extreme depth of evil and suffering. For persons living in Latin America, on the other hand, social problems caused by economic dependency and the legacy of colonization are of major interest. For African Americans, it is the legacy of slavery and racial prejudice that takes center stage. For a white middle-class American, the threat of violent gun crimes or incurable diseases, such as malignant cancer, may be the most pressing issues. It is my thesis that there is a correlation between the kinds of suffering that are given prominence of place and different types of intellectual response to evil. In other words, the decision about how to appropriately respond to evil and suffering, whether in practical or theoretical philosophical mode, is context-dependent.

Within the sociohistorical context of this project, the varieties of response to evil and suffering among philosophers and religious writers are numerous, and the strategies of approach are complex. However, four issues recur repeatedly and figure prominently in contemporary reflection. The first two issues are "theoretical" ones concerning: (1) the explanation of the origin of evil, as a cosmological or anthropological question and (2) the justification of suffering, exposing God's reasons for allowing suffering. In contrast, evil and suffering also raise difficult "practical" issues, namely: (3) how a person can cope and even find meaning in the face of suffering and (4) how to alleviate or resist suffering by means of individual or collective action.[2] The dominant academic approaches to evil and suffering primarily address theoretical issues of explanation and justification.

THEORETICAL THEODICY

From classical to contemporary times, theists have investigated the theoretical and conceptual questions raised by evil and suffering. Typically, such discussions are categorized under the subject heading "theodicy," a term whose etymological roots are the Greek words "God" (*theos*) and "justice" (*dike*).

Among contemporary philosophers, it is widely agreed that the core logical problem of theodicy concerns the apparent incompatibility of the following triad of propositions: (1) God is perfectly good, (2) God is omnipotent, and (3) evil exists.[3] According to common, pre-analytic understandings of God's attributes, it would seem that a perfectly good God would want to eliminate evil as much as possible, while an omnipotent God would have the power to prevent some, or perhaps all, evil occurrences. Within the variety of contemporary approaches, some authors focus on the rebuttal of specific objections to theism, taking a strategy of defense. A "defense" proposes logically possible reasons why God might permit evil. Other thinkers shoulder the explanatory task of developing theories concerning God's policy in permitting evil and seeking God's actual justifying reasons for permitting evil.[4] For the purposes of this project, I propose an inclusive definition of "theodicy" as any approach to the issues of evil and suffering that attempts to explain or justify the relationship between God and evil. Theodicy is a discourse that promotes the rational plausibility of theism, whether in a defensive or explanatory mode.

Although theodicy has generated energetic debate in recent times, the logical conundrum raised by the previous triad of propositions is by no means a recent discovery. It was articulated in ancient Greek philosophy by Epicurus, in Roman times by Platonist philosophers Philo and Plotinus, and again in the fourth century by Saint Augustine. Prominent medieval philosophers such as Anselm and Aquinas advanced theistic discussion of evil with sophisticated proposals for understanding God's goodness and power. What is distinctive in the modern era, from the seventeenth century to the present, is that theodicy discussions of God and evil are increasingly formulated in response to the critical attack of skeptics and atheists. An indicator of this heightened interest in problems of evil is the fact that the term "theodicy" is a neologism, coined by German philosopher G. W. Leibniz in the eighteenth century.[5] Leibniz's *Theodicy* is a key reference point for modern discussions of evil and suffering, especially among contemporary analytic, Anglo-American philosophers, as is Hegel's theodicy among continental philosophers. Leibniz is notorious for making the claim that the universe we live in is the "best possible world" that God could have actualized. He neutralizes the badness of evil by claiming that evil is a necessary component in the overall aesthetic goodness, harmony, and plenitude of the universe as a whole. Already during his lifetime, the optimism of Leibniz's best possible world argument was ridiculed. Notable among his critics is the French writer Voltaire who expressed scathing objections to Leibniz's view in his satirical novel of misfortune *Candide* through the character of the priest Pangloss, and also in response to the cataclysmic Lisbon earthquake of 1755. For

Voltaire and modern philosophers such as David Hume, the issue of evil is a lightning rod for attacks on the rationality of theism.[6]

The theoretical approach of Leibniz, although not without its critics, has influenced recent discussion of theodicy. For example, Leibniz's "best possible world" approach to theodicy is reworked by American analytic philosopher Roderick Chisolm. What interests Chisolm is how evil, which is valued negatively, can contribute to the greater positive value of the universe as a whole.[7] He reasons that a world containing evil may be valued as good as a whole, if good elements in the world can include, within themselves, evil subelements. Just as a painting that contains certain ugly blotches can be judged good because of the way that the blotches contribute to the positive value of the design, so can God's creation be judged as requiring some evil as necessary for its positive value. If this is the case, then the good of the whole can "defeat" evil subelements present in the world, for evil is an inherent part of what is good.

More recently, philosopher Marilyn McCord Adams has criticized Chisolm's best possible world theodicy for justifying evil on a global level because such an approach neglects how God's goodness is actualized for each person. But Adams looks favorably on Chisolm's notion of "defeat" as a way to explain how God can overcome evils experienced by individuals. She asserts that God ensures within the organic unity of each person's life that evils are integrated into an overwhelmingly good whole, which has positive personal meaning. According to Adams, God is able to defeat horrendous evils through numerous means, including direct divine contact with persons and divine participation in suffering. Even the mass killings of Holocaust concentration camps are (purportedly) unable to destroy the positive value of life for any individual, since the process of defeat is accomplished by divine intervention during life and also after death. Adam's theodicy does not explain the reasons why God permits evil, but hinges on the divine guarantee that each person's life is of great good to him or her on the whole.[8]

A different angle on theodicy issues is taken by thinkers who consider human free will as a key justification for evil. Many philosophers consider free will as highly valuable, despite the fact that it opens the possibility of evil deeds committed by human beings. An important contribution to this line of thought, among analytic philosophers, is the "free will defense" proposed by American thinker Alvin Plantinga. Plantinga's defense is intended as a rebuttal to atheist critics who argue that it is impossible that God and evil can coexist in any possible world. These critics suppose that a good, omnipotent, omniscient God would want to prevent evil and be able to do so. To counter this objection to theism, Plantinga's defense aims

to show that the existence of evil and the existence of God are logically compossible.[9]

Plantinga proposes that a perfectly good God might have created a world containing evils in order to obtain a good result not attainable in any other way. Plantinga's position hinges on the assumption that human free will and freely chosen good actions are of high value, even though free will opens up the possibility of evil. According to his definition of freedom, a "free act" is an act that is not determined causally in any way by one's genetic makeup, by one's environment, or even by God.[10] Moreover, he holds that every free person is possibly sinful and, therefore, free to choose evil. Given the independence of human freedom from divine control, it is clearly impossible for God to guarantee that persons will always freely choose moral good.[11] Plantinga defends God's permission of evils on the grounds that a world containing a favorable balance of moral good over evil might require the existence of free creatures, hence, the possibility of evil. Nevertheless, such a world would be, arguably, more valuable than a world without free creatures at all.

His defense successfully combats the atheistic accusation that theism is positively irrational on an abstract level. But Plantinga does not give a substantive explanatory account of God's justifying reasons and purposes for creation. He distinguishes his defense from "theodicy" because, according to his definition, theodicy seeks to know the actual reasons why God permits evil, whereas a defense seeks only logically possible reasons. Nevertheless, according to my broader definition of the term, Plantinga's approach is categorized under the rubric of theodicy.

Among recent proposals taking a constructive, explanatory approach, *Evil and the God of Love*, by John Hick, is one of the most influential contributions to theodicy debate.[12] Hick's theodicy offers a teleological explanation for evil that prioritizes the moral and spiritual development of human beings. According to Hick, the world is an environment designed to be conducive to the "soul-making" process: a process of development that builds moral and spiritual maturity.[13] In a world suitable for soul-making, persons are not coerced into moral action or recognition of God, nor are the consequences of evil choices prevented by God. Qualities such as courage, persistence, generosity, compassion, and faith can be developed by individuals, often in the face of suffering and adversity. The world contains numerous evils. Some evils result from deliberate human choices to cause others harm; others are accidents, attributed to human actions or natural forces. In some cases, evils can serve as a means to moral and spiritual growth—for the perpetrator, victim, or bystander—although not all evils advance moral and spiritual development.

A major challenge to Hick's theodicy is the existence of dysteleological evil: evil ruthlessly destructive and damaging to persons, evil that seems disproportionate as punishment for wrongdoing and that obstructs the soul-making process. Accounts of the inmates in Nazi concentration camps illustrate how physical and psychological suffering can debilitate individuals. Hick admits the horror of dysteleological evils. However, he explains it as playing a positive role in an environment that is suitable for soul-making. Such evil serves the function of evoking sympathy for those who suffer, according to Hick, because the purpose of such suffering is a mystery. If we knew that God had created the world so that suffering always serves either to foster spiritual development or as fair punishment for one's actions, we would not have compassion for those who suffer or be motivated to help.[14] Hick's response to dysteleological suffering is an eschatology that posits post-mortem existence. He holds that, in the end, the soul-making process of each individual will reach completion and evil will be totally overcome.

On the whole, philosophers engaged in theodicy debate rework the concept of God, building on the contributions of medieval philosophers in order to propose more subtle analyses of the divine attributes. In particular, attention has centered on the notion of divine omnipotence. For example, in his defense, Plantinga proposes that divine omnipotence does not entail that God can make free human beings choose what is good.[15] Hick takes divine omnipotence to mean that God has the power to guarantee universal fulfillment of each individual's soul-making career, continuing into a post-mortem realm, but not that God can predetermine free choices.

An alternative approach to divine power is formulated by process philosophers, inspired by the metaphysics of twentieth-century American philosopher Alfred North Whitehead. Process thinker Charles Hartshorne ridicules the doctrine of omnipotence as a theological mistake because it implies that God is an absolute monarch or tyrant who is unworthy of worship. He holds that it is metaphysically impossible for God to have a monopoly on power because all creatures have partial self-determining power in cooperation with God. His proposal is that God has persuasive power, which lures creatures toward actualizing what is good, but God does not have the power to prevent evil.[16] Divine omnipotence is also rejected by feminist thinkers, such as Dorothee Soelle and Rosemary Radford Ruether, as a patriarchal ideal that is incongruous with divine love. They prefer to conceive of divine power as cooperative and relational power, immanent in the world.[17] The promise of God's future "Kingdom" or "Reign" represents the redemptive ideal of partnership in community, overcoming the social evils of violence and suffering. Divine power is the power of cooperation, while evil power lies in domination. Evil may be described using biblical imagery as

the operation of "fallen powers" that are sociopolitical forces in the material world causing violence and oppression. These powers may be represented as spiritual or demonic forces, as well as collective human forces gone awry.[18]

In the intellectual space of twentieth-century thought, the term "theodicy" has accumulated pejorative connotations among some analytic and continental philosophers. Objections are made to the claims of theodicies to discover the actual or possible justifying reasons why God allows evil. Given the epistemic distance between God and God's finite and comparatively puny creatures, it appears questionable whether these reasons can be comprehended or whether language even represents divine reality.[19] Many thinkers find theodicy distasteful because it appears to connote that God plans or permits horrible suffering for our good. They would prefer to say that we cannot know God's reasons, rather than base their case on an instrumental justification of evil, as Hick does. Other thinkers object to theodicy because it seems that the crucial questions of meaning sparked by apparently meaningless suffering are ignored by global justifying reasons or because theodicy effaces the social causes of suffering and moral resistance. In particular, post-Holocaust thinkers widely reject theodicy as morally scandalous.[20] Questioning the religious appropriateness of theodicy, the following chapters are dedicated to the discussion of objections and alternative practical responses.

CONTINENTAL ALTERNATIVES TO THEODICY

This project takes a distinctive approach to the topic of God and suffering by focusing on continental thinkers who eschew theodicy.[21] Their objections to theodicy target the type of comprehensive philosophical account of God and history offered by G.W.F. Hegel, although these objections also apply to Leibniz and contemporary analytic approaches. The Jewish and Christian thinkers examined in this book belong to the twentieth-century intellectual movements of existentialist and Marxian philosophy. The four central figures studied are existentialist religious thinkers Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973) and Martin Buber (1878–1963) and Marxian-influenced political religious thinkers Ernst Bloch (1885–1977) and Johann Baptist Metz (b. 1928). Buber and Bloch are Jewish, while Marcel and Metz are Roman Catholic. In choosing these authors, I do not intend to imply that they provide a representative cross section of Jewish or Christian responses to evil and suffering. Nor do I claim that they somehow typify existentialist or Marxian schools of thought, which are movements dominated by nonreligious exponents. On the contrary, it must be emphasized that these authors are innovators who forge distinctive philosophical perspectives. In developing a typology of

approaches, this project accentuates similarities that extend across the boundaries of Jewish and Christian intellectual traditions. For the authors studied, religious tradition is self-consciously refracted through the prism of philosophical assumptions; thus, there is no simple binary distinction between "Jewish" and "Christian" responses to the Holocaust, which would assume an essentialist reading of each tradition. Rather than focus primarily on the differences between Jewish and Christian responses to evil, as is often the case in comparative studies, I capitalize on strategic points of similarity between the two pairs of Jewish and Christian thinkers with common intellectual influences.[22]

Indeed, it is striking that the differences between the authors from the same religious tradition are so pronounced and far-reaching. Although Jewish thinkers Buber and Bloch both have deep intellectual roots in German philosophy and literature, they portray faith in God very differently. Buber is a scriptural Jewish thinker who turns to the Hebrew Bible and Hasidic Judaism as sources of revelation and models of faith. Bloch identifies himself as an atheist, and his universal vision of utopian hope is inspired by a panorama of literary and philosophical writings. Both Marcel and Metz are Roman Catholic thinkers who appeal to divine mystery to account for the persistence of faith and the absence of theodicy answers. However, Marcel's philosophy concentrates on how individual persons find meaning in suffering through acceptance, and hope in God and immortality. Emphasizing resistance rather than acceptance, Metz analyzes faith "praxis" in response to suffering that centers around memory, solidarity, and political protest. Parallels emerge between the existentialist and political pairs of Jewish and Christian thinkers that reveal shared philosophical perspectives on faith across the boundaries of tradition.

An interreligious approach is particularly apt for discussing responses to the Holocaust that reject theodicy because Jewish-Christian dialogue is a hallmark of post-Holocaust thought. For many Jewish and Christian thinkers, the Holocaust has prompted the rethinking of basic questions concerning God's goodness and redemption. Christian thinkers have confronted theological and historical anti-Semitism and reconsidered the supersessionist connotations of the new covenant in Christ, while Jewish thinkers have reexamined the meaning of the covenant with God, the historical role of the Jewish people, and relations with the Christian churches. On both sides, writers have sought to identify how the Holocaust poses a distinctive challenge to theology. Over the span of the twentieth century, interest in Jewish thought among Christian theologians has increased. A case in point is the sizable impact of Martin Buber and Ernst Bloch on existentialist and political Christian theology, respectively.

The major authors studied in this book are "post-Holocaust" thinkers because they all respond to the Holocaust in their writings. For them, the Holocaust serves as a test case for reflection on evil and suffering. However, they are "early" post-Holocaust thinkers, in the sense that they were formulating their ideas before the bourgeoning publication of memoirs, novels, and historical materials made "Holocaust studies" an academic discipline in its own right. Theological responses centering on the Holocaust as a unique and decisive historical event did not develop widely until the 1970s, in response to broad cultural awareness of the Holocaust and the availability of survivors' writings articulating the scope of Holocaust trauma for faith.[23]

As a project spanning the disciplines of philosophy of religion and theology, this book identifies and analyzes the distinctive features of existentialist and political responses to suffering. My aims are both critical and constructive. I analyze the philosophical assumptions and motivations of each author in rejecting theodicy, while, constructively, I expose and profile two types of "practical" approaches that seek productive engagement with evil and suffering in response to Auschwitz. Further, I examine the legacy of these two practical approaches in the writings of more recent authors who take a "contextual" approach to theology and theodicy issues, employing post-Holocaust, feminist, and liberation perspectives. In moving beyond the four major authors, my reflections will center particularly on practical alternatives to theodicy in the Christian tradition, where the influence of these approaches is apparent.

My work calls attention to practice, although the method of approach taken is more formal than practical. The book traces key currents in the recent intellectual history of continental and contextual Jewish and Christian thought. It explores descriptive and phenomenological accounts of faith postures, such as hope, using selected narrative illustrations to study the application of these postures to the Holocaust and other situations of suffering. Centrally, the aim of my comparative analysis is to create space for practical approaches to grow. The exploration of the pragmatic resources of faith in coping with suffering is a neglected task, especially among many contemporary philosophers of religion. Yet, in my view, the discovery of practical religious meaning is more significant than exploring the logical coherence of theodicy in response to testimonies of persons facing actual evil and suffering. This conclusion is supported by contemporary post-Holocaust thinkers who view theodicy as neither productive nor necessary for a faith response to suffering.[24]

In the academy, whether practical or theodicy approaches are the focus of intellectual labor is a decision that reflects the scholar's interests and social location, as well as the interests of readers who make such publications

viable.[25] My scholarly work on the problem of evil exhibits special interest in post-Holocaust, feminist, and liberation thought where issues of responsibility and justice converge. I promote a practical focus motivated by concern for those who suffer, particularly due to social causes, and also by the desire to explore the ethical potential of faith to respond to suffering. My engagement with evil and suffering is spurred by historical and political consciousness more than by personal struggle with evil and suffering. As an American and Canadian dual citizen who grew up in a white middle-class Protestant family, I recognize that I have been protected from the impact of evil and suffering in numerous ways by my social location.

Reflecting on my response to the Holocaust, I have often pondered the expression "*die Gnade der späten Geburt*" [the mercy of late birth] and its moral significance in relation to my own birth. This issue came to the fore especially during the year I spent in Hamburg, where I studied German responses to Auschwitz and visited many historic sites connected with the Nazi era. This popular catchphrase, coined by former Chancellor of Germany Helmut Kohl, appears in the media in reference to more recent generations of Germans who bear no responsibility for the Holocaust on account of their youth. In a political context, the phrase implies the desire to let go of the Nazi past and rejuvenate German national consciousness.[26] However, I find myself unable to identify with the sense that it is by "grace" or "mercy" that I am not morally implicated in the events of the Holocaust, even though I am not German. In my case, it is not only my age, but also my nationality and religion that protect me merely by chance from responsibility as a Christian bystander to genocide. If I had lived in Germany during the Third Reich, statistically speaking, I likely would not have resisted the persecution and deportation of Jews. Moreover, in the present, I am also protected by "grace" or chance on a local and global level. My social position has enabled me to benefit from a broad and tangled web of situational factors, such as white privilege, Christian hegemony, higher education, economic comfort, the struggles of the women's movement, international sweatshop labor, and American dominance in global affairs.

Yet my luck of birth does not remove me from the Holocaust or other social and historical injustices. Although I am "late-born," I recognize a strong sense of continuity with Holocaust-era Christians that troubles me very much. I am appalled when I reflect on Christian anti-Semitism throughout the first two millennia of Christendom. I want to think that Christian faith would motivate widespread resistance against suffering and evil perpetrated against the Jews and others, but it often does not. In fact, the opposite is true; faith often justifies exclusion and prejudice. I would also like to think that faith in God helps persons who suffer to survive and

combat the causes of suffering, whether during the Holocaust or today. Sometimes it does help, although not always. Drawing on Jewish and Christian writers, this book explores how faith helps victims respond constructively to suffering. Contrary to what many philosophers assume, coping with suffering does not require discovering answers that explain why God allows evil. The widespread rejection of theodicy among post-Holocaust Jewish and Christian thinkers, extending far beyond the group of authors studied in this book, convinces me that there is need for attention to alternative practical faith responses.

It is intriguing to me that Jewish and Christian existentialist and political approaches reject theodicy, despite major differences in their philosophical assumptions. But despite this opposition, it is important to recognize a formal similarity between theodicy and its alternatives. As religious discourses in response to suffering and evil, theodicy and practical approaches perform the same basic function: the task of making faith plausible, although not necessarily in theoretical, propositional, or doctrinal terms. Sociologist of religion Peter Berger observes that theoretical theodicy functions as a support for religious faith against the disruption of suffering that tears the "sacred canopy" of Jewish and Christian belief in a good Creator God.[27] This canopy is the articulation of a world-order affirming God as the good, loving, and just ruler of history. Theodicy is "theocentric" in orientation, in the sense that it attempts to stop the gaps in knowledge of God and God's acts, making it plausible that theistic beliefs are true. According to my definition, "theodicy" is any discourse that attempts to explain or justify God's reasons for permitting evil and suffering.

Alongside the logical conundrums it raises, evil may also provoke a crisis of identity and meaning for the person who believes in God.[28] It is possible to reject theodicy and yet affirm that suffering can be made meaningful without explanation of God's ways. On an individual and a social level, religious attitudes and patterns of action can be resources for constructive engagement in the struggle with suffering. In contrast with theodicy, practice-oriented approaches to evil, such as those offered by existentialist and political philosophers, are "anthropocentric" because they display how faith is a plausible response to coping with evil by showing the pragmatic resources of belief in God.

Existentialist and political thinkers propose two types of practical response to suffering, and to the Holocaust in particular.[29] The term "practical" is not meant to imply that existentialist and political thinkers do not make any theoretical or philosophical claims whatsoever. They indeed do so in developing original philosophical methods to discuss intersubjectivity, morality, evil, and faith in God. However, they do not develop detailed

theoretical-conceptual positions about God's attributes or God's activity, nor do they attempt to explain or justify evil globally by proposing actual or possible reasons. The Holocaust is not rationalized as instrumental for God's purposes, but is approached practically from the position of survivors who seek to find productive responses to suffering.[30] They tackle the topic of God and evil by focusing on concrete evil: evil experienced as suffering affecting persons.

The meaning of "suffering" is, most basically, to endure harm. Suffering extends beyond bodily pain to include psychological, social, and spiritual symptoms of distress, such as grief, trauma, depression, isolation, or despair. In response to the Holocaust, practical alternatives to theodicy focus principally on suffering rather than evil. As a result, they tend to assume the perspective of victims rather than perpetrators, although the study of perpetrators' faith attitudes is also a potential avenue for practical investigation.

Existentialist and political approaches have different philosophical assumptions about the main features of faith, and from these models of faith follow distinctive accounts of how faith responds to suffering. Their philosophical assumptions also influence what kinds of suffering are given primary attention. It is my thesis that there are correlations between philosophical method, models of faith practice, and the examples of suffering chosen as paradigmatic.

For existentialist and political thinkers, two practices in response to suffering receive the most attention: (1) the religious posture of hope and (2) the posture of "other-regard." It will become clear that there are different versions of Jewish and Christian hope in God, although the thinkers are united in distinguishing hope from sheer optimism. Moreover, for the thinkers studied, attention to others who suffer is alternately individual or collective in focus. More recently, contextual political and liberation theologians have been formulating practical approaches to suffering, calling attention to persons who suffer injustice or oppression.[31] Existentialist and political approaches offer philosophical precedents for these contextual theologies by their methods of situating evil in terms of relational or socioeconomic realities and by their portrayals of faith as alternately accepting and resisting suffering.[32]

KANT'S PRACTICAL TURN

The philosopher who sets a precedent for practical twentieth-century existentialist and political responses to suffering is Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). In particular, three elements of Kant's approach are influential: his rejection of speculative knowledge of God, his view that faith in God is a necessary postulate of morality, and his dismissal of theodicy.

To understand Kant's negative verdict on theodicy, it is important to appreciate the crucial distinction that Kant makes between "pure" and "practical" reason. Kant's philosophy as a whole is motivated by dissatisfaction with two major philosophical options of his time: the skeptical empiricism of David Hume and the rationalist metaphysics of Leibniz and his followers. On the one hand, Kant rejects Hume's empiricist view that ideas are "mental pictures" derived solely from sensory impressions, and he opposes Hume's skeptical denial that scientists can have knowledge of the truth concerning reality.[33] Nevertheless, Kant takes seriously Hume's sharp critique of Leibniz's rationalist metaphysics, which uses logical deduction from *a priori* principles to obtain knowledge of the truth about reality. Kant ridicules this speculative approach as theoretical web spinning that oversteps the limits of human reason and produces illusory knowledge.[34]

Kant responds to the challenge of skepticism using a divide-and-conquer strategy. He defends the truth of scientific knowledge gained through the use of theoretical reason, but he modestly concedes that we have no theoretical knowledge concerning morality and religion, which he assigns to the practical realm. In the first tome of his mature philosophy, the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant meticulously delineates the capacities and limitations of pure speculative reason. In his terms, pure reason studies the realm of *phenomena*, which include objects directly perceived by the senses and entities observable only through their effects, such as atoms or distant planets. The employment of pure reason produces theoretical knowledge of *phenomena* investigated in physics, chemistry, biology, empirical psychology, and other sciences. According to Kant, knowledge of *phenomena* is produced by means of *a priori* structuring principles, known as the "categories," that synthesize the raw intuitions gathered by the senses. The categories are principles of order and relation among *phenomena*, for example, space, time, causality, and substance. All human experience of *phenomena* necessarily involves the application of the categories.[35]

By identifying the subject matter of science as *phenomena,* which, by definition, are epistemically accessible because they are the product of the mind's activity in organizing intuitions, Kant protects the truth of scientific knowledge from skeptical objections. However, Kant concedes to the skeptic (contra Leibniz) that reason cannot obtain *a priori* knowledge of the truth of reality as it is independent of human experience. It is impossible to know "things in themselves," which Kant refers to as *noumena,* because scientific reason cannot bypass the mediation of the categories to access reality.[36]

Given that theoretical knowledge is limited to *phenomena*, it is not surprising to discover that the truth about important ultimate questions, such as questions of religion or morality, cannot be discovered. For example, pure

reason cannot adjudicate whether the world has a divine First Cause, nor can it know whether human beings have freedom from the causal laws governing nature. Specifically, Kant identifies four antinomies of metaphysics that are insoluble, where the poles of each antinomy are the positions taken by rationalist and skeptical philosophers, respectively. The antinomies run as follows: (1) The world has a beginning, or it is infinite. (2) Substances are composed of simple parts, or they are not. (3) There is dual causality of nature and freedom, or solely natural causality. (4) There is a necessary being (God), or there is none. Although the antinomy of God's existence is insoluble, Kant proposes that the idea of God can serve as a heuristic device to encourage scientists to pursue progress in knowledge of *phenomena*. Scientific investigators operate *as if* there is a God, who is the single, supreme, intelligent Author of the world, when they presume that nature will display regularity and order, but Kant does not consider it strictly necessary for scientists to believe in God. In contrast, Kant holds belief in God (and freedom and immortality) to be a necessity for human beings exercising moral reason, as we will see shortly.[37]

Kant takes pains to expose the illusions of pure reason in claiming to prove God's existence. Kant dismisses the *a priori* proof of speculative ontotheology, put forward by Leibniz and other rationalist philosophers, because it illegitimately deduces from the definition of God as *ens realissimum* (most real being) that God is necessarily existent. Kant responds that existence is not a predicate: to say that a thing "is" does not add to the concept of a thing, hence, God's existence is not entailed by the concept of the most real being. Moreover, Kant condemns the proof of cosmotheology, which traces the sequence of causes in the universe backwards, jumping to the unwarranted conclusion that there is necessarily a First Cause. And third, Kant dismisses the proof of physicotheology, which demonstrates God's existence as Creator based on the appearance of order in the world.

For Kant, there can be no knowledge or proof of God by means of theoretical reason because God is not a *phenomenon* bounded by space, time, and causality. Kant upholds a central intuition of Jewish and Christian faith in affirming that God is immaterial, invisible and spiritual, transcending all objects and finite beings.[38] He concludes that God belongs to a nonphenomenal plane of reality, which he calls the noumenal realm. God's distinctive ontological status accounts for the epistemic impossibility of theoretical knowledge of God.

It is important to note that Kant considers absence of knowledge of God, not as detrimental, but as a positive advantage for morality. In fact, Kant sees fit to boast that "I have found it necessary to deny *knowledge* [of God], in order to make room for *faith*."[39] Proof of God's existence would create

intellectual coercion and negate the possibility of rational and autonomous moral choice. Knowledge that God rewards and punishes human actions would make persons unable to freely will the good for its own sake. Instead, motivation to do good would be based on fear or hope for reward, not on the self-legislation of practical reason.

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant identifies three aspects of the noumenal realm: God, freedom and immortality.[40] We may well wonder how anything can be said about *noumena* if this realm is inaccessible to theoretical knowledge. Kant responds with the assertion that it is legitimate to make conjectures or "practical postulates" concerning *noumena* based on what practical reason discovers to be the necessary conditions for morality.

Concerning the postulate of freedom, Kant holds that freedom is necessary for moral choices. He asserts that the moral question, What should I do? implies that human beings have the capacity to guide their actions in accordance with self-imposed rational principles. In other words, moral agents act as if they can make rational choices. For the moral outlook to be rational, according to Kant, the human agent must postulate freedom of the will: freedom is a condition of the possibility of morality. Freedom is impossible in the realm of *phenomena*, is governed by deterministic laws of cause and effect, such as the laws of Newtonian mechanics. However, Kant asserts that freedom is possible in the noumenal realm. Kant conceives of human persons as belonging to two realms: as moral agents they recognize themselves as free, but as physical beings they exist as *phenomena* in nature.[41]

The idea of immortality is a necessary postulate of practical reason because, Kant argues, it is rational to will the good only if one believes that it is possible to achieve moral virtue and move progressively toward moral perfection (the *summum bonum*). Practical reason demands moral justice, and justice requires faith that, sometime in the future, happiness will be proportioned to moral virtue. Kant does not envision this moral *telos* occurring in history, as utopian Marxian thinkers would insist. Rather, morality necessitates that we posit the immortality of the soul in the noumenal realm. It is clear that moral hope for justice is not supported by knowledge of *phenomena,* for virtue and happiness are not fairly proportioned in this world, as the book of Job illustrates. Instead, hope requires that the laws governing the realm of nature, indifferent to justice, will eventually be overturned.[42]

Faith in God is a third practical postulate necessary for morality.[43] Moral hope looks toward future justice. But only God can complete the teleology of moral hope, rewarding moral virtue with happiness and harmonizing the order of freedom (*noumena*) and the order of nature (*phenomena*). As a practical postulate, Kant holds that the idea of God should be formulated according to the needs of morality, not the needs of scientific reason.[44] Kant

depicts the God posited by practical reason as having the following key attributes: holy lawgiver, good provider of happiness, and just judge of moral actions.[45] God's holiness, goodness, and justice account for why God would want to proportion happiness to virtue. Morality also requires that God have knowledge of all human deeds, the wisdom to judge them, and the power to harmonize virtue and happiness. Kant develops the practical postulate of God in a fair amount of detail. Nevertheless, he remarks modestly that "we have only obscure and ambiguous view into the future; the Governor of the world allows us only to conjecture his existence and majesty, not to behold or clearly prove them."[46] We can have no theoretical expectations of God based on scientific prediction, only practical hopes. But although we lack knowledge of God, it is wrong to assume that moral faith is therefore tentative. According to Kant, the requirements of morality are a very firm basis for positing God's reality and God's morally necessary attributes.

FROM THEORETICAL THEODICY TO PRACTICAL FAITH

Kant's polemical essay entitled "On the Miscarriage of All Philosophical Trials in Theodicy" opens up a new vista of religious response to suffering. Kant defines theodicy as "the defense of the wisdom of God against the tribunal of human reason."[47] Given the limits of pure reason, Kant obviously considers "speculative" theodicy impossible. But he acknowledges that the regulative, moral idea of God raises theodicy conundrums, and he thinks that it is worthwhile to articulate them. Kant identifies physical evil (pain) and moral evil (sin or crime) as aspects of reality that appear contrary to divine and human purpose. The main issue of theodicy for Kant is not the question of why human beings do evil, for he is convinced that the human will is prone to weakness and corruption.[48] Rather, the urgent issue for Kant concerns the nonappearance of justice and purposiveness in the world, and the disappointment of hope. Moral faith demands a teleology ending in moral perfection and the just proportioning of virtue and happiness. However, in the natural order there is no correlation between good deeds and reward or between evil deeds and punishment. Kant's major concern is the unfair distribution of suffering, or unhappiness, irrespective of moral virtue. After testing various avenues of accounting for God's reasons for evil, Kant concludes that theodicies based on moral reason's concept of God are inconclusive; they fail to untie the theodicy knot and reconcile evil with the wisdom of the Creator.

After exposing the failure of theodicy, Kant heatedly argues that theodicy is, in fact, an inappropriate type of faith response to evil and suffering. In contrast, he showcases the book of Job as providing an "authentic" religious response to evil. Kant approves of Job's dismissal of the advice of his friends as neither comforting nor intellectually compelling. Job's suffering cannot be explained rationally as fair punishment for sin, as his friends suggest. Nor should Job's protest cease on the basis of his friends' assurance that God will compensate him for his goodness later in his lifetime. According to Kant, Job's frankness makes him the perfect model of an individual with authentic faith in God. Kant points to two features of Job's response as exemplary: honesty in the avowal of the powerlessness of reason, and sincerity in the expression of his thoughts.[49] Honesty indicates recognition of the limitations of knowledge in the face of divine mystery; sincerity involves admitting that the situation of unjust suffering is deeply scandalous to moral consciousness. These practical postures are accompanied by lament for suffering and protest against the world's injustice. Job posits a God who will respond to his prayers and bring justice, thus meeting the demands of Job's moral sensitivity. Job frankly admits that God's goodness and justice are hidden in his own experience of the physical world. As exemplified by Job, Kant shows that faith is compatible with protest—indeed faith *requires* protest concerning the unfair distribution of suffering caused by moral evil or natural forces. Because moral hope is always unfulfilled, faith stands in tension with the reality of human experience. For Job and all persons who suffer, future justice is not an item of knowledge but of faith. In the following chapters, the analysis of existentialist and political responses to suffering reveals that the themes of hope and protest, found in Kant's analysis of Job, are prominent alongside rejection of theodicy.[50]

HEGEL'S HUBRIS: THEODICY REVIVED

Crediting Kant's objections to theodicy would imply both the rejection of Leibniz's theodicy and more recent theodicies such as the one proposed by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831). Hegel's contribution is important not only because of his prominence in the tradition of German philosophy after Kant, but because he formulates the epitome of a philosophical discourse that is self-consciously offered as a theodicy. A striking feature of Hegel's philosophy is his bold rejection of the limits that Kant places on speculative reason. Eschewing Kantian epistemic modesty, Hegel asserts that reason can comprehend the idea of God and the internal logic of history from beginning to end. In explicit defiance of Kant, Hegel revives

speculative metaphysics and speculative theology. He replaces Kantian moral faith in God with knowledge of God, and he substitutes Kantian hope for divine justice with absolute knowledge of future justice.

For the purposes of this project, the crucial feature of Hegel's philosophy of history is the fact that it functions as a theodicy that justifies all human suffering. According to Hegel, history is ordered in progressive stages that build on one other. Every event in history is necessary for progress. Hegel asserts that developments in history follow a logical pattern. Forward movement occurs by means of dialectical cycles involving conflict, contradiction, and the overcoming (*Aufhebung*) of oppositions. He claims that each dialectical cycle improves on former stages, capitalizing on the strengths of the past and overcoming its weaknesses and inadequacies, which Hegel terms moments of "negativity." Hegel locates human suffering on the negative side of the dialectical movement of history.[51]

Hegel identifies the dialectic of history with the self-development of Spirit (*Geist*), where "Spirit" is defined as the sum of human consciousness and its products, including all aspects of culture and civilization. Consciousness, or Spirit, realizes itself in and through matter and human life. Over the course of history, humanity gradually gains knowledge of the world and is able to shape material conditions into increasingly rational social forms. Since all human activities are sites of Spirit's self-development, the dialectical stages of progress in history show parallel advances in all spheres of life: political and social institutions, scientific knowledge, fine art, and religion.[52] However, Spirit is not merely the name for developing collective human consciousness, for Hegel identifies Spirit with the Christian God. History operates according to a rational pattern because history is the self-movement of God. The final *telos* of history is the Absolute: the end of history is the high point of self-conscious rationality manifest in human individuals and groups, and the total manifestation of God in the world.

Although some interpreters sidestep the religious dimension of his philosophy, Hegel clearly considers his dialectic of history to be a theistic teleology and, thus, a theodicy. His theodicy rests on the claim that history is, in fact, the narrative of God's own self-development. Hegel draws on Lutheran theology to elaborate his understanding of history as the Trinitarian, relational movement of God as Father, Son, and Spirit.[53] Creation is understood as the process through which the aseity of God's self-sufficient Being becomes manifest or, to use theological vocabulary, "incarnate" in the physical world. According to Hegel, the second person of the Trinity, God's Son, is the Logos who goes forth from God and becomes actual in the world. Hegel adapts Luther's dramatic depiction of Christ's crucifixion as the "death of God"—a phrase that expresses the estrangement between God manifest in

human life as Spirit and God's absolute Being. According to Hegel, creation and incarnation represent the "othering" or "emptying" (*kenosis*) of God and, at the same time, the manifestation of God in human life. Even what is fragile, finite, and weak, the "negative" in history, is a moment of the divine and found within God. Hence, God suffers in history.[54]

In contrast with free will theodicies that circumvent divine responsibility for evil by blaming human freedom for the existence of evil, Hegel boldly affirms that God's self encompasses evil and negativity. God is not responsible for evil in the sense that God decides to allow evil and was free to do otherwise. Hegel rejects a voluntaristic notion of divine freedom. Rather, God is implicated in evil because history itself is God's history.

To overcome divine self-estrangement and the estrangement of the world from God, individual self-consciousness or spirit must become aware of its status as the manifestation of God's Spirit. Spirit's self-consciousness, displayed in human life, unites Father and Son (God and creation) and the whole human community together in mutual love. The climax and *telos* of history (the Absolute) occurs when Spirit becomes fully manifest in creation and global unity and harmony encompass God, nature, and humanity. Theologically speaking, history's path as a whole can be termed "the movement of divine Providence" because history is God's self-realization in the world. The end of history, for Hegel, is equivalent to the Christian ideas of the "Kingdom of God" and "salvation," which indicate the reconciliation of God and creation.[55]

The final goal of Spirit in history is clearly utopian and ideal in character. Hence, it is remarkable to discover that Hegel locates the ultimate self-realization of Spirit not in the future, but in his own era.[56] Hegel praises Protestant Christianity as the highest religion, constitutional monarchy in Prussia as the most rational form of state government, and his own philosophy as the highest stage of Spirit's realization.[57] Indeed, Hegel's warrant for claiming complete knowledge of God and history rests on his claim to have found an Archimedean place of leverage from which to judge the world. Hegel's philosophy can comprehend the whole because it evaluates history from the perspective of its end, an absolute vantage point.

Hegel's justification of suffering in history takes two forms: instrumental and holistic. Instrumental justification makes suffering a necessary means to achieving the Absolute. The value of the end goal confers value on each of the steps required to reach it. It is also important to recognize Hegel's justification of suffering as holistic.[58] Hegel confers value on suffering by his claim that each step in history is the highest manifestation of God's Providence thus far. Each stage has inherent divine worth in itself and not only value as a means to an end. The framework for Hegel's holistic justification is

unequivocally theistic and Trinitarian. The weakness of instrumental justification is the fact that the worth of the historical process is conferred retrospectively only if and when the end is achieved, while the victims of history are merely used as instruments of global progress. Moreover, the global sweep of Hegel's holistic justification also fails to address adequately the position of the victim. Hegel's claim that God's history is the justification for human history (and suffering) does not take into account issues of meaning and justice for individuals who are the "debris" left in the wake of progress. However, God's involvement in history opens the possibility that suffering might somehow have value for victims—for example, if persons were to view their suffering as part of God's history or if they could experience God's presence in suffering.[59]

HEGEL AS PROTOTYPICAL TARGET OF CRITIQUE

It is not difficult to perceive how Hegel's philosophy offers a theodicy of ultimate comprehensiveness. Without apparent scruples, he brazenly justifies the suffering of individuals and groups as part of the alienation and frustration necessary for the positive dialectical developmental process of history. Although it may seem that Hegel is insensitive to suffering, it is a misunderstanding to conclude that Hegel underestimates its horror.[60] On the contrary, he speaks of history as a "slaughter bench" where individuals and groups are sacrificed. Clearly, he recognizes the magnitude of suffering. Nevertheless, Hegel's theory of history justifies and valorizes suffering by mapping all events, even the most horrendous, as points on a continuum of progress. For example, war is legitimated retroactively, serving as a "motor" of history, destroying old civilizations to make way for new ones. Large-scale destruction is only apparently meaningless.

Hegel's system serves as a model for what theodicy aims to accomplish. The following general marks or features of theistic theodicy can be extrapolated from his proposal: (1) theodicy claims knowledge of God and God's acts in history, (2) it holds that there is good reason for suffering, and (3) it rationalizes suffering as unavoidable or necessary. With the knowledge that evil is overcome, hope becomes redundant, and protest irrational. Protest is merely a sign of one's ignorance of God's plan in which suffering is necessary to serve a good end. Critics of theodicy, among them existentialist and political religious thinkers, assert that theodicy legitimizes suffering and that it undermines protest and resistance.

In analyzing objections and alternatives to theodicy in the following chapters, I will begin with the consideration of existentialist approaches. Chapter 2 studies French Roman Catholic phenomenologist Gabriel Marcel, focusing on his attention to "evil experienced," or suffering, and the practical religious responses of hope and fidelity to other persons. Chapter 3 examines German Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, who points to a transcendent dimension in I-Thou relations that gives meaning to suffering shared in community. Chapter 4 makes a transition to Marxian approaches with their distinctive approach to suffering as a socioeconomic phenomenon, while the following two chapters are devoted to analysis of political religious approaches. Chapter 5 centers on Jewish Marxian thinker Ernst Bloch and the influence of his utopian interpretation of hope on the political theology of Jürgen Moltmann, and chapter 6 studies Roman Catholic theologian Johann Baptist Metz and his account of how memory and narrative ground hope and solidarity.

The concluding chapters evaluate the two types of practical response to suffering, contrasting their placement of suffering and their depictions of the practices of hope and other-regard. Chapter 7 argues that both approaches are limited in the scope of faith resources they draw on to formulate a religious response to suffering. However, the political approach is judged to be most promising because of its recognition of the social context of suffering and the importance of resistance. I will test the capacity of the political paradigm to take up key existentialist insights by an examination of recent contextual, post-Holocaust, and liberation theologies among (mainly) Christian theologians who have been influenced by continental thinkers. The final chapter assesses the appropriateness of theodicy in light of the philosophical objections raised. Based on my philosophical commitments and instructed by the critiques and proposals offered by existentialist and political thinkers, I propose four guidelines for contemporary philosophical and religious responses to suffering that point the way beyond the inadequacies of theodicy.