

BEYOND THEODICY

**Jewish and Christian
Continental Thinkers
Respond to the Holocaust**

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8 Beyond Theodicy

Evaluating Theodicy from a Practical Perspective

THE CONTEXTUAL APPROACHES to suffering examined in the previous chapter are extensions of the political approach in their attention to social position. But they do not repeat the Marxian fixation on revolutionary resistance found in the work of Bloch and Metz. Instead, a dynamic balance between faith postures of acceptance and resistance emerges. Cumulatively, contemporary post-Holocaust, feminist, and liberation thinkers give subtle accounts of how the practices of memory, solidarity, hope, and mystical faith vary according to circumstances of suffering. Each one of these faith practices enables sufferers to find the resources to survive under difficult circumstances. In cases of voluntary suffering resulting from resistance, there is meaning found in the intentional effort to help one's self and others. Involuntary suffering may be accepted as meaningful or not, depending on the situation. Horrific suffering symbolized by the Holocaust, slavery, or Latin American poverty is not viewed retroactively as positive or justified, and global theodicy meanings are not projected onto suffering.

Granted that the insights of existentialist and political approaches are not mutually exclusive, this final chapter returns to the philosophical issues raised in chapter One. It reflects on the common intellectual commitments that motivate the rejection of theodicy, in the wake of the precedent set by Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant. Despite their differences, it is striking that neither existentialist nor political thinkers address the logical problems that suffering raises for the rational plausibility of theism, nor do they engage in systematic reflection on God's nature. This chapter probes the main reasons for these omissions and the variety of objections to theodicy that have been raised. A key question at stake is whether practical approaches tolerate theodicy as an alternative approach or dismiss it entirely.

To conclude this comparative project, I will evaluate the overall possibility and appropriateness of theodicy from a practical perspective. The first part addresses a complex set of issues: (1) practical faith in God, (2) the epistemic impossibility of theodicy, and (3) the moral scandal of theodicy. The second part proposes four guidelines for religious approaches to evil and suffering that encourage philosophical and theological discussion of these themes to move beyond the shortcomings of theodicy.

THE POSSIBILITY AND APPROPRIATENESS OF THEODICY

Practical Faith in God

The epistemic possibility of theodicy is called into question by the Kantian distinction between *phenomena* and *noumena* and the division between scientific knowledge and moral faith. We have seen that Marcel and Buber endorse a Kantian-style epistemological dualism between the I-It realm of problem solving and the realm of I-Thou relation where God is encountered. Moreover, the Marxian thinkers studied posit a twofold distinction between the social sciences that analyze the facts of history and plan political strategies, and the practical postures of hope and faith that motivate resistance. Although these thinkers are by no means disciples of Kant, they operate with epistemic dualisms that echo the distinction between *phenomena* and *noumena* without using this terminology. In addition, existentialist and Marxian thinkers appear to share certain Kantian perspectives concerning God. They agree that God functions as a practical postulate necessary for faith and hope in the face of evil and suffering. Rejection of scientific knowledge of God is motivated by moral considerations—namely, that knowledge of history (such as Hegel advances) is counter to moral hope that goodness will be rewarded and perpetration of suffering punished. Theodicy is judged to be wrongheaded because it applies a theoretical approach to practical faith.

Kant rejects theodicy because it claims theistic knowledge that is impossible within the finitude of theoretical or speculative human reason. Similarly, a point of convergence among existentialist and political thinkers in their rejection of theodicy is the theistic conviction that God is a mystery remote to theoretical knowledge. They seem to agree that God is not a *phenomenon* in the spatiotemporal realm. Indeed, Hebrew scriptures support the view that there is a sizable ontological and epistemic gap between God and creatures. The commandment prohibiting images or idols representing God is commonly understood by Jewish and Christian thinkers to signify that

God's being transcends what is physical or material (Ex. 20:4). Corresponding to God's transcendence is God's mysteriousness and partial hiddenness.¹ The theme of divine hiddenness is thematic in the writings of the Psalms, the prophets, and the book of Job. In the Jewish tradition, this theme is also prevalent in rabbinic writings, the negative theology of Maimonides, and the mysticism of the Kabbalah. In the New Testament, narratives of the crucifixion suggest that Jesus becomes estranged from God the Father who seems absent, while the apostle Paul is famous for his dictum that, in this life, our knowledge of God is a dim and dark reflection of divine reality (I Cor. 13:12). Many Jewish and Christian thinkers, and not only those categorized as mystics, hold that God is so great as to exceed conceptualization.² The transcendence of God's being makes it inevitable that there is a wide epistemic gap between human subjects and God's mystery. It is not necessary to categorize God as noumenal to maintain this position. In contrast to Kant's approach, existentialist and political thinkers bracket speculation about God's nature and do not exploit the claim that God's hiddenness is beneficial for morality.

The acknowledgment of divine hiddenness or mystery denies success to theodicy because God cannot be understood, and motivates a practical approach that focuses on faith postures and on how faith fulfills practical and moral needs. In response to evil, faith in God is necessary for hope in certain highest goods, such as the alleviation of suffering, the achievement of moral goodness, or the establishment of a just society. When one reflects on what kind of God would meet these needs and hopes, practical postulates about God arise. The Jewish and Christian types of hope, explored in previous chapters, implicitly assume certain features of God. The authors studied affirm that God cares about creatures, God values moral goodness, and God promises redemption. They presume that God is accessible to persons in prayer or I-Thou relation; thus, faith has a mystical dimension of contact with the divine. The view that God is beyond epistemic reach is recurrent in the Jewish and Christian traditions, but it does not imply that God is beyond direct personal contact.

In contrast, Kant's practical faith does not make room for encounter with God and it is dismissive of mystical experience. This prejudice reflects disapproval of what Kant perceives as the emotional excesses of eighteenth-century German Pietism.³ One reason for his objections to mysticism is the fact that, for Kant, "experience" in space and time occurs only within the phenomenal realm. As noumenal, God cannot be an object of possible experience but only a subject of practical moral reflection. Kant also discounts the possibility of religious encounter because it seems to compromise moral autonomy. Just as knowledge of God would emphasize a morality based on

desire for reward or fear of punishment, direct encounter with God might give experiential proof of God's existence with the same deleterious effects. However, these objections do not hold if divine-human encounters are noumenal and not determined by natural causality. The mere possibility of I-Thou encounter with God requires the exercise of freedom because the individual must choose to be open and receptive to God, and the initiative of divine freedom and grace is required to make opportunities for persons to encounter God. The "I" encounters God as a free, moral, and noumenal self. Such encounter with God does not produce scientific knowledge and is compatible with divine hiddenness affirmed by mystical faith.

In interpreting the book of Job, Kant refuses to credit religious experience. In his essay on the failure of theodicy, he admits the importance of Job's encounter with God, which trumps Job's many questions about God's reasons for allowing suffering. But Kant evades the significance and reality of the divine voice from the whirlwind. Instead, he moralistically concludes that what Job learns is simply the limitations of human understanding of God. Kant holds up Job as an example of practical faith, uncompromising in demands for justice and unflinchingly honest about epistemic limits. Job is a model of sincerity, humility, and moral conscience.⁴

Reading Job, existentialist and political thinkers reject the theodicy of Job's friends and admire his moral protest, but they do not deny the possibility or reality of encounter with God. Although divine encounter seems to indicate a noumenal dimension beyond the physical world, practical thinkers rely on narrative language to speak of God and do not use the framework of metaphysical categories. Narratives situate faith in a historical context. Scriptural and traditional narratives are the sources of concepts, metaphors, and doctrines. As such, they are not dispensable portrayals of faith but primary sources for theological discourse.⁵ Alongside hope-filled narratives, firsthand encounters with God are a possibility for individuals, vital for sustaining moral, mystical, and liberatory faith in the face of suffering.

The Epistemic Impossibility of Theodicy

The practical authors studied tend to be conceptually reticent, even agnostic, about God's nature and attributes. Their work emphasizes the importance of religious postures directed toward God and language addressed to God in prayer or protest. They do not debate whether encounter with God is noumenal or whether God is real as independent and transcendent over history.⁶ However, it is important to distinguish between levels of theological reticence. The thinkers studied do not entirely lack concepts of God. They clearly assume God's attributes of love and moral justice. But,

interestingly, they do not exploit the attribute of divine suffering to make evil comprehensible or bearable. Marcel, Buber, Bloch, and Metz all refuse to justify God conceptually. We have seen that Metz sharply criticizes Moltmann for eternalizing and mythologizing suffering in God, a Trinitarian understanding of divine suffering intended to rebut accusations of divine cruelty magnified by Auschwitz. Moltmann's approach is primarily that of systematic theology, although he articulates political concerns. Conceptual explication of theism is Moltmann's key response to theodicy questions that challenge God's goodness and power, whereas practical approaches scrutinize faith practice without developing the attributes of God.

The work of German liberation theologian Dorothee Soelle is instructive in overcoming this impasse. Like Moltmann, she affirms divine suffering because for God to be an omnipotent spectator is a moral scandal from the perspective of Auschwitz. Yet like political thinkers, she takes a praxis-centered approach. In her theology, conceptual discussion of God is not developed apart from articulation of human relation to God. She situates divine suffering as immanent within human history, shared by persons who resist suffering and injustice. Citing Buber, she insists that theology is wrong to theorize about God abstractly, apart from the world. Reflection on doctrine tends to reify and reduce God to an object, in contrast to more adequate forms of discourse—narrative and prayer—where God acts and is addressed. Her narrative approach is nonsystematic, theologically speaking, but centers on analyzing religious life and how persons of faith seek God. Soelle does not posit suffering in God's being, as Moltmann does, but she uses the image of divine suffering to indicate the discovery of representative meaning in suffering. Her theology does not hinge on divine suffering but divine relationality: the sharing of divine power with humanity in mutual interdependence. God is found in human suffering, but God also transcends it as enduring love.⁷

In surveying post-Holocaust and liberation responses to suffering, there is no consensus among Jews or Christians as to whether divine suffering substantially helps persons of faith cope with massive evils. Judged by practical criteria, the idea of a suffering God does not necessarily make human suffering meaningful, nor does it motivate stronger hope or protest.⁸ After all, a God who is not enmeshed in suffering can help persons rise above its damaging effects and see themselves as God's partners in alleviating suffering. In contrast, emphasis on divine suffering can glorify suffering as exemplary for persons of faith, whereas most human suffering is involuntary and damaging. In my view, suffering can be given representative meaning when dedicated to God, but only by the agency of the person who suffers. There is no necessity to posit divine suffering to give human suffering meaning. What is necessary is that human suffering is related to God.

Although Marcel, Buber, Bloch, and Metz refuse systematic development of God's attributes, their practical approaches involve certain posits about God. Questions about God's goodness and justice can begin at a practical level even though it is the case, as Kant recognized, that God's reasons for evil cannot be made intelligible and theodicy fails.⁹ It is striking that many philosophers working on theodicy would in fact concede that theodicy is not sufficient for a religious response to suffering. They would admit that evil and suffering raise existential and moral challenges that theodicy does not address, but which deserve to be addressed by other kinds of responses. However, they disagree about whether responses to these practical challenges fall within the discipline of philosophy, rather than psychology or pastoral care. Among many analytic philosophers of religion, moral or practical faith issues are divorced from logical argumentation about God and evil.¹⁰ The preceding chapters show that continental thinkers, who address practical faith through philosophical lenses, have much to contribute to reflection on coping with suffering. I do not condone the division between theodicy and practical issues, where the former lies in the domain of philosophy and the latter is relegated to the pastoral domain. Unlike most analytic philosophers of religion, I hold that theodicy is neither central nor sufficient for upholding faith intellectually because it cannot achieve what it sets out to do: to find actual or possible divine reasons for evil. In my view, practical coping postures such as hope and solidarity, not theodicy reasons, sustain faith in response to evil and suffering.

The question remains, Is theodicy discourse that attempts to understand God's nature and plans for history ruled out by a practical approach? Most basically yes, in the case of theoretical theodicy that uses theories about divine agency, impassibility, sin, salvation, or postmortem existence to explain or justify evil and suffering. Universalizing religious discourses efface the ruptures of suffering in history. Moreover, faith does not warrant the knowledge base that is needed for theodicy.¹¹

However, the rejection of theodicy does not entirely dismiss religious reflection about evil and suffering or the issues that theodicy raises. As philosopher Paul Ricoeur has observed, evil creates an intellectual *aporia* that a practical response can make productive. While he rejects theodicy as a vestige of modern Enlightenment philosophy, he affirms that the myths and symbols of evil give rise to thought.¹² In Ricoeur's practical response to evil, reflection on evil and suffering centers on the interpretation of scripture and myths through which persons create a narrative religious self-understanding. He distinguishes between a religious "response" and a theodicy "solution" to evil. A response involves the individual taking action to resist evil and its causes, and discovering the spiritual wisdom to love God without seeking protection or reward.

I hold that the discussion of theodicy issues—as opposed to “theodicy” as represented by Leibniz, Hegel, and analytic philosophers—can and does occur in a practical context where the faith subject struggles with God, evil, and suffering. We have seen that one of the major questions raised in practical reflection is: How can my suffering serve God? Such a question may lead to conversations about God's involvement in my suffering and the theological issue of whether God suffers. The focus of such reflection is primarily on coping with personal suffering, surviving, and practicing resistance. As God's companionship is sought, understandings of God and creation can emerge, drawn from Scripture and tradition. Suffering can be dedicated to serving God and designated as representative for the sake of others.

Academic discussion of theodicy issues reflects, explicitly and implicitly, the political interests and cultural assumptions of particular communities at particular times. This historicist insight is a Marxian one, but it is also found among the contextual theological approaches examined in the previous chapter. Although Marx's opium metaphor is discredited as a stereotype of religion, his conviction that religion arises within social and economic conditions and reflects class interests is widely accepted by social scientists and scholars of religion, although less widely by analytic philosophers of religion. As cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz defines it, “religion” is a cultural-linguistic system that interprets reality and creates “long lasting moods and motivations” within a given community. From this perspective, responses to evil and suffering appear as culture-bound discourses, or language-games, that continuously shift between cultures and evolve as religious traditions engage present conditions.¹³ Viewed in relation to Marxian thought and cultural anthropology, my investigation of practical thinkers studies how discourses about suffering and the Holocaust reflect cultural and intellectual assumptions. My approach centers on faith postures, such as solidarity or hope, as these postures are articulated in written texts or narratives interpreted in response to the Holocaust. Practical faith responses are plural and intratextual, revealing conflicting philosophical, and traditional religious presuppositions.

The Moral Scandal of Theodicy

Moral objections are directed at the global, justifying reasons proposed by theodicy.¹⁴ Theodicies persist in giving all-encompassing explanations on a theoretical level that do not engage the actual process of finding meaning for individuals. Some philosophers try to give theodicy a practical slant, but the problems of universal justification remain. In the theodicy of John Hick, for example, the moral and spiritual development of individuals justifies God's

permission of evil and suffering. However, his theodicy glosses over worst-case scenarios where suffering warps and destroys persons rather than fosters soul-making. He does not deal with how theodicy discourse functions morally in situations of suffering, nor does Hick give attention to the uneven distribution of suffering among groups, such as Jews or African Americans. Especially for such groups, to say that suffering is for the sake of moral training and faith building ignores the institutionalization of prejudice and violence against them and its lethal effects.

The unsatisfactory treatment of horrendous evils in Hick's theodicy is criticized by Marilyn McCord Adams, who seeks to combine theoretical and practical considerations in responding to evil. She criticizes impersonal global justifications of evil, which ignore the plight of individuals whose lives are ruined by horrendous suffering. Her theodicy argues that God's overwhelming goodness toward persons who suffer provides a source of positive meaning that engulfs the suffering of each individual in the context of one's life as a whole. Adams justifies horrendous suffering on a personal level, on the basis of God's goodness to each person during or after the occurrence of suffering. In defending her position against potential criticism by post-Holocaust and liberation theologians, she insists that her theodicy is not insensitive to moral responses but is "complementary" to practical resistance to suffering and oppression.¹⁵ However, this disclaimer is defensive and unconvincing because moral opposition to suffering is not integrated with the redemptive meaning found in suffering. Human agency is portrayed as diminutive and weak, since the overcoming of suffering is primarily accomplished by God. Adams's theodicy promotes acceptance of suffering and reliance on God for persons of faith, without the counterweight of individual or collective resistance to social suffering that makes protest imperative.

In post-Holocaust thought, global theodicy answers are put to the test as applied to Nazi concentration camps. Jewish thinker Irving Greenberg makes the dramatic statement that no theological reasons for suffering should be made that are not "credible in the presence of the burning children" in Auschwitz.¹⁶ His litmus test for theodicy is that if its reasons cannot be asserted in the face of such suffering, it is a scandal to apply such justifying rationale. I understand Greenberg's statement as having two distinct implications: (1) theodicy is inappropriate in the actual presence of such suffering (at the time it occurs), and (2) it is inappropriate to project theodicy onto such a situation after the fact.

It is not difficult to accept his first point, that theodicy would be inappropriate in an actual concentration camp setting. It is insensitive to bring up theodicy reasons when persons are in the throes of pain or barely surviving desperate circumstances. Instead of providing comfort, theodicy reasons

would be more likely to provoke anger, tears, or accusations directed at God. The theodicy claim that God intends suffering for some greater good would make the sufferer feel abandoned and abused by God.¹⁷ It might not even be possible for victims to sustain faith under such grave circumstances. A survey of the writings of Holocaust survivors and post-Holocaust thinkers show that camp victims were not inclined to accept that justifying reasons, advanced by theodicy, could logically reconcile God's goodness with the evil experienced in the camps.¹⁸ Yet many persons continued to pray to God and hope that God would end their suffering and heal its scars. Faith and hope were (and are) practical postures necessary for coping with suffering.

But why not discuss theodicy reasons after suffering has ended? After all, persons generally need to make some sense of what happens. Looking back on the Holocaust in a reflective moment, a person may well be interested in God's reasons for permitting evil. Surely concentration camp survivors might, some time after the fact, reflect on why God allowed their suffering and the suffering of millions, including burning babies. In conversation or I-Thou dialogue with a person who has suffered, it may indeed be appropriate for me to discuss possible divine reasons or religious meanings for suffering, if asked to do so. For example, psychiatrist Viktor Frankl took it on himself to encourage fellow inmates at Auschwitz to find hope and meaning in suffering when he was asked for advice.¹⁹ But like the existentialist writers studied, Frankl emphasizes that only the individual can apply reasons or meaning to personal suffering. He would agree with Emmanuel Levinas that the suffering of the other is "useless" and unjustified suffering that should be resisted and not condoned by bystanders.²⁰ For individual agents, personal suffering may be voluntarily given religious meaning, as it happens or in retrospect, but it is a moral scandal to impose meaning (including theodicy reasons) on the suffering of others. To do so is illicitly to exercise the privilege and responsibility of the actual victims. Hence, as Greenberg would agree, the suffering of the children who died in the flames at Auschwitz should remain unjustified. There is no intrinsic value to suffering because ethical or theological value is conferred only by the assent of the sufferer. Most post-Holocaust Jewish and Christian thinkers reject assigning any intrinsic value to suffering, although many orthodox Jewish and conservative Christian thinkers still maintain that all suffering is redemptive.²¹

Holocaust suffering and other suffering in the past need not be remote for nonvictims here and now. It can be made present by means of memory. Sensitivity to the past requires a moral consciousness of history, which ensures that we never become dispassionate or distant regarding the suffering of others who are removed from us by time or geographical distance. The

person who reflects on suffering with moral sensitivity is *always* in the presence of burning babies.

Memory of the Holocaust is not simple repetition of the past, but rather is constituted by cultural assumptions and media images. For North Americans and Europeans, remembrance of the Holocaust is mediated through countless novels, films, plays, photographs, histories, newspaper articles, lectures, and so on.²² Now more than fifty years after the event, the witness of Holocaust survivors is rarely available through personal I-Thou conversation. Remembering entails vicarious listening involving multiple layers of memory removed from the event of the Holocaust. Yet memories are not doomed by the passage of time to be remote and dispassionate. Memory can raise moral consciousness of the violence of the past and connect me in solidarity with others. Without endorsing redemptory closure or justification, memory exposes the ambiguities of history and implications for how history is memorialized in the present.

In contrast, theodicy effaces the testimonies of victims of the Holocaust and other historical catastrophes. It also sanctions the suffering of others, adopting the perspective of a dispassionate bystander. As a corrective, narratives of suffering deserve primary attention and should serve as a critique for meta-level philosophical or theological discourse.²³ Post-Holocaust and Marxian thinkers converge on the insight that morally acute, historical memory motivates the moral faith postures of solidarity, protest, hope, and resistance. Theodicy is harmful because it condones evils by ignoring their social dimensions. This moral criticism is not directed toward the authors of theodicy, but toward theodicy as an intellectual product. The academic discourse of theodicy itself has moral force. Theodicy names what is evil in a manner that prioritizes certain areas of reflection, such as God's nature or human freedom, and neglects others, such as the material analysis of social evils. It must be recognized that academic discussions of God and evil have declarative power that usually goes unrecognized by those who propose theodicies: the power to name and focus on certain types of evil and to silence other memories of suffering.²⁴ Narratives of suffering from the margins are needed to disrupt the false totality of the discourse of theodicy and to counteract its moral evasions.

GUIDELINES FOR FAITH RESPONSES TO EVIL AND SUFFERING AFTER AUSCHWITZ

Based on the analysis of post-Holocaust continental thinkers, I argue that philosophical religious approaches to evil and suffering need to move beyond

the theoretical theodicy approach in order to situate discourse about evil socially and to respond morally to the suffering of individuals and groups. As a philosopher of religion, I choose to devote my attention to developing practical approaches. It is my recommendation that this area of reflection deserves attention by all religious thinkers who address the themes of evil and suffering.

In conclusion, I propose four desiderata that are intended as guidelines for philosophical and theological approaches to evil and suffering. They deal with the following themes: (1) epistemic humility, (2) moral sensitivity, (3) religious practice, and (4) narrative memory. The first two points are essentially prohibitions against intellectual immodesty and immorality, while the second two indicate constructive moves toward a situated religious discourse in response to theodicy issues.

Epistemic Humility

I join existentialist and political approaches in affirming the appropriateness of epistemic humility regarding theories about God's nature, acts, and purposes. It should be noted that epistemic modesty comes in various degrees and does not require Kantian convictions. For Kant, ideas of God can be posited according to the needs of morality, but knowledge of God is impossible since God is noumenal. Philosophers who are "realists" take the commonsense view that persons can have knowledge of what is the real fact of the matter concerning the world and God. Analytic philosophers who are epistemic realists, such as Alvin Plantinga and John Hick, do not necessarily think that it is possible to know the actual or complete reasons God has for creating a world containing evil, but only possible or plausible reasons. Pursuing theodicy justifications, analytic philosophers who are "skeptical realists," such as Marilyn McCord Adams, hold that one can develop theoretical frameworks aiming for maximum consistency, coherence, and explanatory power without presuming that one can know reality with certainty and without assuming that the truth about reality can be demonstrated to convince every reasonable person. In contrast, the cultural-linguistic or narrative approach examines intratextual meanings of God-language and the function of religious discourses in faith communities. Theodicy questions are raised centering on what Ricouer calls a faith response to suffering and evil, as opposed to a solution. Then there are nonrealist philosophers of religion such as D.Z. Phillips who view "God" as a word that refers to human spiritual dispositions, thus ruling out the possibility of theodicy altogether.

Along the spectrum of theistic realism and nonrealism, I counsel that in the interests of epistemic modesty philosophers and theologians should

recognize that theodicy, which explains or justifies God's permission of evil and suffering, aims at an unreachable goal.

Moral Sensitivity

Theodicy discussion is charged with moral failure for not recognizing suffering that specifically afflicts oppressed groups. From Augustine onward, evil in the world has been categorized as either "natural" or "moral." The flaw in this typology is that systemic or institutional suffering has been masked under the category of moral evil. Only in the twentieth century have religious thinkers proposed that evil caused by social, economic, and political systems should be differentiated from evil attributed to the sins of individuals. Individual repentance is not the whole answer to problems such as racism, sexism, and poverty because they are structurally imbedded in political and economic systems. As an antidote, religious thinkers should attend to memories of evil and suffering that provide critiques of social and political systems. Narratives can expose the subjugated memories of those who suffer and teach faith communities about the realities of prejudice and violence.

Especially after Auschwitz, philosophers should take care to reflect on the application of theodicy reasons to mass suffering. It is morally objectionable to apply theodicy reasons to the suffering of others, unless requested to explore such reasoning in conversation with a person who suffers. When philosophical discourse on evil is situated in the interpersonal dimension, it becomes apparent that theodicy is an inappropriate response to the appeal of the Thou who suffers, which is an urgent appeal demanding a practical moral response. Although philosophers who advocate theodicy doubtless do not intend immorally to condone others' suffering, by giving reasons they presume that others' suffering is ultimately positive or useful. The justification of suffering serves to corroborate bourgeois apathy toward the need to make large-scale changes in institutions.

On the other hand, it is not morally insensitive for victims to respond to suffering by reflecting on its religious meaning, which raises theodicy issues. A person can designate suffering as prophetic or representative, endured for the sake of others. Suffering can be framed as a trial or challenge for God's sake, both when suffering is voluntary, due to acts of chosen resistance, and also when it is involuntary, due to social oppression or natural causes. The search for meaning takes place in the context of individual and communal religious practices, such as prayer, I-Thou relation, hope, and solidarity. Moral sensitivity is empty without action against the causes of suffering. Every response to suffering is context-dependent and should be attentive to the possibility of faith resistance to suffering on political and personal levels.

Religious Practice

For religious thought to move beyond theodicy means that philosophical effort should shift from global, conceptual theodicy treatments of God and evil to concentrate on situated practices of faith response to suffering. Practice does not exclude theory, for a practical approach requires a methodology to study faith practices. This paradigm shift signals the recognition that it is artificial to separate theoretical discussions of God and evil from discussion of personal context and moral issues, as if conceptual concerns can be treated independently from ethical ones. As shown previously, even abstract global theodicy has unrecognized practical implications for condoning the acceptance of suffering.

Inspired by existentialist and political thinkers, I urge that reflection on practice should guide the formulation of religious meanings in response to suffering. For instance, both Buber and Metz, despite their different philosophical motivations, approach discussion of God's promised redemption through examining the religious postures of hope and solidarity or I-Thou relation. They do not treat the idea of redemption theoretically as a set of propositions giving knowledge of the end of history, but as embodied in narratives that extrapolate a hopeful future. Focus on faith practice is also found in recent writings on spirituality and mysticism, where liberation and feminist theologians seek meaning in suffering without theistic justification.²⁵ Given attention to practice, faith is understood as centrally involving prophetic and moral postures and not propositional assent or belief. In contemporary Jewish thought, there has not been a dramatic turn toward "practice" parallel to the political and liberation movements in Christian thought, although there are currents of Jewish liberation theology in dialogue with Christian thinkers.²⁶ In Jewish thought from biblical and rabbinic times to the present, practice has been an integral component of reflection on community and commandments. Post-Holocaust Jewish thinkers regularly discuss practice when they reflect on such central issues as covenant identity, God's involvement in history, and religious observance.²⁷ In recent Jewish and Christian thought, the call for attention to practice follows on the heels of developments in philosophy and theology that emphasize the cultural and textual imbeddedness of religious discourses. In a practical context, theodicy issues can be raised in dialogue without abstracting and systematizing religious ideas to legitimize evil and suffering.

Narrative Memory

A corollary of attention to religious practice is attention to "narrative" that broadly includes written or oral memories, histories, Scripture, poems, dramas,

liturgies, biographies, and reports of prayer and dialogue. Reflection on the stories of persons who face severe suffering shows that theodicy reasons fail to satisfy and are scandalous when applied to cases of extreme suffering such as the Holocaust. The narrative of Job confirms that perplexity concerning God's goodness and justice is valid, even for persons with exemplary faith in God, and that attempts at cognitive comfort are unconvincing. The writings of Holocaust survivors and post-Holocaust thinkers suggest that the most probing, honest faith responses to suffering include substantial protest and questioning of God. Responses to the Holocaust involve wrestling with traditional religious texts that affirm God's goodness.²⁸ The accounts of persons who face systematic oppression based on class, gender, or race, such as African-American writers or "Third World" theologians, display that the coexistence of faith and suffering does not hinge on finding plausible accounts of how God's goodness is logically compatible with evil. Such voices are dangerous memories that disillusion philosophical ambitions for discovering final answers.

Practically speaking, religious responses to evil and suffering are situated discourses that should center on narratives. Responses to suffering are commonly recorded and written as third-person narrative reports, but they also take the form of first-person discourse in which I express my own suffering and faith. Moreover, responses may occur within I-Thou dialogue that consists in second-person address and response, recorded as a conversation or drama. Since my own experience and that of my personal contacts may be limited to a middle-class environment, memory of suffering is critically important. Attention to narrative offers a wide spectrum of viewpoints about how suffering occurs and how faith responds, although memory can never give complete or universal awareness. Existentialists use narrative reports of I-Thou dialogue to examine how meaning-making can take place in interpersonal contexts, while Marxian-influenced thinkers employ methods of the social sciences to analyze the causes of collective suffering using the narrative histories of oppressed groups. In my view, narrative should be a primary source for reflection on faith responses to suffering because it can encompass both personal and political components of faith postures. It allows for distinctions between liberation and survival hope, as well as contextual reflection on how faith in God and hope are intertwined in various concrete situations. Narrative is a mode of remembrance that brings the truth of the past into present consciousness. Overall, it is in reference to narratives, whether they are articulated in first-, second-, or third-person language, that the context-dependent variables of religious acceptance and resistance to suffering are exposed.

In addition to serving as a resource for awareness and reflection, narrative also functions to inspire faith and hope. Stories showing persons responding

to suffering with active hope, love, and justice, such as biblical narratives, can motivate political protest through their examples. For instance, the "slave narratives" of African-American spirituals are song lyrics with multiple coded meanings that speak of coping with oppression, hoping for justice, and trusting in God. When persons sing the spirituals, they can tell these stories of struggle as their own story, projecting themselves into the situation of slaves singing songs of freedom.²⁹ The memory of faith withstanding the oppression of slavery is dangerous and sustaining. Because narratives can display the meanings of hope, solidarity, and love, they are primary sources for examining religious practices for surviving suffering.

An example of biblical narrative that offers assistance in coping with suffering is the book of Job. The story of Job can provide a person who suffers with words of lament and complaint to God. If I read the text as a Thou and project myself into Job's drama, I can hear God's voice from the whirlwind as addressed to myself. As I imaginatively enter the story, I face my own suffering with protest to God, as Job did, I become aware of others' suffering, and I am encouraged to hope. The biblical text mediates dialogue with God. Contemporary narratives of religious persons coping with suffering also express protest alongside God's sustenance. In reading the first-person reflections of a Christian father who lost his twenty-five-year-old son in a mountain-climbing accident, I may find encouragement to dialogue with God even when coping with wrenching grief. The father's struggles with the insufficiency of theodicy explanations may assist me to voice my own lament and find the presence of God in love, even bereaved love.³⁰

Although in most post-Holocaust theology the narratives of victims and survivors are central, I have found that narratives of German women who lived under Nazi rule also provoke challenging reflection on suffering.³¹ These women, protected from anti-Jewish prejudice as Aryans, speak of bombing raids, hunger, bereavement, and the threat of punishment for breaking Nazi laws. They are not Holocaust victims subject to genocidal governmental policies, yet they experience and witness suffering. Some of their narratives speak sympathetically about Jews, while other women are evasive in sharing memories of their Jewish neighbors or their knowledge of the concentration camps. As a gentile, I read these women's stories with questions about the ease of moral complicity in prejudice and social persecution. Although faith is not frequently mentioned, I remember these narratives in order to examine the reactions of Holocaust "bystanders" and the Christian cultural heritage that shapes my perspective on the Holocaust and its victims. Not only am I a bystander to Holocaust history, but in the present I am a bystander to local, national, and global suffering and oppression that I remember, but am not directly involved in. While the testimonies of

victims recall how brutal and useless much suffering is, by remembering the stories of German women, I reflect on how bystanders to suffering can also be victims of suffering and how religious affiliation may fail to spur resistance to the suffering of others. The exploration of practical faith responses undertaken in this project can be expanded to include consideration of non-exemplary faith responses to suffering, by perpetrators and bystanders, where others' suffering is not resisted. Reflection on narratives from multiple sources not only potentially deepens but also broadens academic approaches to the study of evil and suffering.

To conclude the book, I propose these four guidelines as correctives that challenge theodicy and open up alternate philosophical and theological avenues. In moving beyond logical and metaphysical approaches typical of modern and analytic philosophy, existentialist and political responses provide an opportunity to explore objections to theodicy. However, they do not provide adequate practical alternatives. Fortunately, such alternatives are developing, and have been developed, in response to the Holocaust and the challenge of massive social suffering, where contemporary Jewish and Christian theologians recognize the centrality of practice and narrative for religious reflection. There is no single uniform appropriate faith response to suffering and evil, nor should there be. Responses to evil and suffering take on different configurations appropriate to different religious communities, given the complex dynamics of coping with evil.

This project has mapped an intellectual history of selected continental figures, who respond to the Holocaust without theodicy comfort. In so doing, it has identified common convictions and directions among a wide range of scholars. Given this critical and comparative orientation, it is fitting to close with methodological desiderata warning against epistemic immodesty and moral insensitivity and encouraging attention to faith practice and narrative, rather than with a normative synthesis of practical responses. To take these four guidelines seriously is to affirm that the plausibility of faith in God must not be defended at the price of concealing the unresolved practical and conceptual tensions between faith and suffering.