CLAUDIA WELZ

Love's Transcendence and the Problem of Theodicy

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Mohr Siebeck

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Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

This book is the slightly revised version of my doctoral thesis, originally entitled *God's (Non)Phenomenality and the Problem of Theodicy,* which has been accepted by the Theological Faculty of the University of Zurich in the winter semester 2006/2007.

What I wish to show with my study is that the problem of theodicy cannot be solved by means of a theodicy, a rational defense of (the belief in a good and powerful) God before the tribunal of human reason, since this problem concerns all dimensions of human existence and cannot be reduced to a logical problem of consistency. But if this way of handling the problem turns out to be a dead end, what would be better alternatives? How can we come to terms with the undeniable 'wound of negativity' – without oversimplifying either the theoretical or the practical dimensions of the problem? These are the questions that have guided my investigations.

My answers to these questions as well as my methodological approach to the problem are unconventional, and so is the structure of this book. It is deliberately not arranged according to a top-down order of levels, which would place the subdivisions of each part in parallel positions. For systematic reasons, the contents of Parts I-III, which make up the main body of the book, are not located on the same level. Rather, they build upon each other in a row of rising complexity. Let me briefly explain the line of argumentation on the different levels.

The aim of this study is to explore responses to the problem of theodicy that do not end up in a theodicy. Instead of asking after the origin and sense (or non-sense) of evil and suffering, it considers God's (non)phenomenality, the dialectics of God's givenness and hiddenness. Neither God nor evil is given 'as such;' rather, God and evil are determined *for* someone *as* something within specific contexts of experience. How does God appear in human life, and how is his phenomenal presence or non-presence related to the ambiguities of our lives? Different traditions of thought offer different answers to this question. Part I (structured in Arabic numbers) is 'basic' in three respects: it clarifies the terminology, it introduces into those thematic aspects of the problem that will reappear in other parts of the book and that have played an important role throughout the history of theology and

philosophy, and it presents the traditions of thought on which the discussions later on are based.

Part II is the central part of the book. It contains a strictly symmetrically composed comparison of Kierkegaard's (Part II, I.) and Rosenzweig's (Part II, II.) responses to seven selected aspects of the problem of theodicy: their reasons for having *no* reason to defend God and their ethics of love, which is an ethics of gift. Both of them follow Kant's practical turn of the problem of theodicy, oppose Hegel's theodicy through history and anticipate Levinas' idea to look for the traces of God's transcendence in human movements of self-transcendence. Moreover, they have remarkable contributions to the current debates on 'metaphysics of presence' and 'onto-theology' – debates that are dealing with the limits of Husserl's and Heidegger's phenomenology. Therefore, it seems fruitful to discuss their responses with reference both to German idealism and Husserlian phenomenology (introduced in Part I) and with reference to French phenomenology (introduced in Part III).

Part III discusses Kierkegaard's and Rosenzweig's approaches in dialogue with three French thinkers. Accordingly, it is divided into three chapters that elaborate on three interdependent problems, namely (A.) the problem of God's alleged absence, (B.) the problem of the (im)possible gift and (C.) the problem of God's (non)phenomenality. More precisely, in dialogue with Levinas, the *presence* of God's love is in question, in dialogue with Derrida God's presence and love as a *gift*, and in dialogue with Marion the gift of God's presence as a 'saturated' self-giving *phenomenon*. The aforementioned seven aspects of the problem of theodicy return here in chapter (A.), yet on another level, since Part III presupposes and qualifies not only the considerations of Part I, but also the comparison of Kierkegaard's and Rosenzweig's responses as described and evaluated in Part II. The differentiation of three levels of discourse permits me to advance chronologically and systematically at the same time. This way, specific contexts of discussion that are normally not connected with each other can be combined in a critical manner.

Finally seeing in synopsis the variations of putting the age-old problem of evil and the attempts to solve it throughout the centuries is an exciting experience. It has inspired me to make a new suggestion in the conclusive part of the book: the suggestion to develop theology as semiotic phenomenology of the Invisible. However, although a synoptic overview before one's inner eyes might seduce into thinking that one has, as it were, climbed a very high mountain to enjoy this panorama, it is decisive not to forget that this journey has been a trip in theory. But life goes on, the train of thought drives further, and many more mountains (and some molehills made into mountains) wait to be climbed by us in praxis. After all, putting theoretical knowledge into practice usually takes even longer than it takes to write and read a book. That is the reason why the conclusion of this book must remain an inconclusive one. The reader who lets the book end where it begins has understood it

best: in the midst of daily life. This is also my privileged place and time to say Thank-you to all those who have been there, from where my book originates.

Acknowledgments

My first thanks goes to Ingolf U. Dalferth, for his far-sighted and open-minded supervision of my project. I am grateful for all his support over the years and the generous way he has let me go my own way. It lies in the nature of scientific work that many ways are lonely ways and most discoveries made silently. But the most vivid of my memories concern the splendid conversations that enriched this work. My thanks is also addressed to Pierre Bühler, above all for the constructive criticism in his evaluation of my thesis, which helped me to sharpen some formulations, but also for his friendliness and reliable cooperativeness. Further, I would like to express my gratitude to Hendrik J. Adriaanse. Although he was in no way obliged to read anything I have written, he volunteered to read the whole manuscript, which was at that time even longer than it is now. I am glad about his insightful remarks from which I have learned a lot. Particularly I wish to thank Arne Grøn, without whom I would neither have begun to write this book, nor been able to finish it without his encouragement, attentiveness and calm advice. His lecture course on *Kjerlighedens Gjerninger* in Tübingen has been the thought-awakening beginning and his research the continued inspiration of my explorations.

I am thankful for all who have been there as my friends and shared with me the pains and pleasures of writing this book. My special thanks go to Iben Damgaard, Hami Verbin and Carl Cederberg, who have read parts of the manuscript and made me reconsider some important points before it went to print. Many thanks also to René Korsholm Rosfort, Søren Overgaard, Richard Purkarthofer, Hagi Kenaan, Hans Martin Dober, Cornelia Richter, Franzisca Pilgram-Frühauf, and Rebekka Klein, who have read articles related to my dissertation and took their time to reply with critical comments.

Laughing together is at least as stimulating as being involved in serious discussions. I wish to say ‘Thank you’ not only to those who have said something to my dissertation, but also to those whose presence in my everyday life at different research institutions and university departments has contributed to concentrated work and pleasant pauses in a favorable atmosphere.

As a Ph.D. student I was mainly affiliated with the Institute for Hermeneutics and Philosophy of Religion in Zurich, where I have profited from challenging seminar sessions and adventurous thought experiments. In this context, I would like to thank especially Philipp Stoellger, Dirk Evers, Andreas Mauz, Christoph Ammann, Andreas Hunziker, Andrea Anker-Meier, and Karin Scheiber. What had been planned as a short-term research stay at the Center for Subjectivity Research in Copenhagen was prolonged several times, and I kept coming back. I very much approve of the excellent working conditions and the magnificent companionship in an international and interdisciplinary scientific community. Thanks to all members of the team, namely, in addition to those already mentioned: Dan Zahavi, Josef Parnas, Dorothée Legrand, Joel Krueger, Thor Grünbaum, Rasmus Thybo Jensen, Morten Sørensen Thanning, Line Ryberg Ingerslev, Johan Eckhart Hansen, Gry Ardal Christensen, Simon Rodovský, and, last but not least, Pia Kirkemann Hansen, who is, as it were, the 'center of the Center.' Additional thanks to Eva Schwarz, who was a wonderful office-mate, and to Lisa Käll, Thomas Brudholm and Wenche Marit Quist – former colleagues at the CFS, who are much more than that.

For half a year I returned to Germany and attended courses on Hegel's philosophy of religion and the *Phenomenology of Spirit* at the University of Hamburg. I would like to thank Jörg Dierken, Michael Moxter and all others whose presence has turned this period into a fruitful time, above all Martin Zerrath, Christina Ehring, Gwendolin Schneider, Miriam Volmert, and the reading circle around Anne-Maren Richter. In winter 2005, I spent a few weeks as a guest researcher at the Franz Rosenzweig Research Center in Jerusalem, which was made possible by Paul Mendes-Flohr and a stipend from the Minerva Foundation. I am particularly grateful for the meetings with Sandra Lehmann and Ashraf Noor, with whom I could speak about Rosenzweig. Elazar Benyoëtz has not only been a partner of a Jewish-Christian dialogue on Job, the problem of theodicy, etc., but a friend whom I missed as soon as I left. I would also like to thank Rabbi Daniel Epstein for an unforgettable conversation on Levinas, which began, after I apologized for disturbing his lunch break, with the words: "Don't be sorry, be yourself!" and ended with an invitation: "You are welcome to disturb me again."

In summer 2006, shortly before I had to hand in my dissertation, I returned to Copenhagen and spent two intensive months at the Søren Kierkegaard Research Center. Thanks to all who have made the place into such a hospitable environment in which to work, especially to Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Bjarne Laurberg Olsen, Jon Stewart, Ettore Rocca, Brian Söderquist, Karsten Kynde, Anne Mette Hansen, Irene Ring, Joakim Garff, Pia Søltoft, Gerhard Schreiber and Andrea Scaramuccia. Moreover, I want to mention a few persons who have, in that final countdown, been 'upbuilding' in the best sense of the word: Lene and Gerardo Palma, whose warmhearted

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Many people have at some point been partners of an occasional conversation about a topic of my dissertation. I wish to thank Michael Olesen, Dorothea Glöckner, George Pattison, Werner Jeanrond, Heiko Schulz, Markus Kleinert, Tim Hagemann, Hans-Peter Großhans, Michael Bongardt, Sebastian Maly, Dorin Dömland, René Dausner, and Katharina Heyden. I also want to thank Eva Petersen, who just like that took the complete third edition of Kierkegaard's *Samlede Værker* out of her bookshelf and gave it to me. Moreover, I owe a mighty thanks to Erika Schaudt, who has promoted my theological studies from their very start and has accompanied my way for nearly 20 years now with untiring interest, kindness and generosity. Many more people have, without knowing, left their traces between the lines of this book. I would have to tell the story of my life if I was to do justice to them all, to those whom I have met just recently, and to those old friends who keep in touch from far away despite my frequent moves.

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I am more than thankful for my family, on whose support I could count in happiness and sadness just alike. The book is dedicated to my parents, Peter and Doris Welz, from whom I have received much more than I could ever account for.

Copenhagen, November 2007 *Claudia Welz*

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Introduction

1. The Central Theme: The Problem of Theodicy and Problems with Theodicies

The central theme of this study is the problem of theodicy. This problem, however, shall be examined with the aim of finding alternative responses that do *not* end up in a theodicy. The term 'theodicy' goes back to Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz' *Essais de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal* (1710). It is a coinage combining the Greek words θεός (God) and δίκη (justice). In its standard Enlightenment version, 'theodicy' stands for a procedure, in which God, the creator of the world, who is accused for the imperfection of the world, is defended and justified before the tribunal of human reason. The problem of theodicy deals with the question of how the theistic belief in an omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly good God is compatible with the experience that there is evil in the world. In its simplest classic form, the problem can be articulated as follows: If God is willing but not able to prevent evil, then he is impotent; if he is able but not willing, then he is malevolent. But if he is both able and willing, whence then is evil?[1]

As an attempt to reconcile the hypothesized existence of God with the perceived existence of evil through the exercise of reason alone, theodicy came to be synonymous with *theologia naturalis* that wants to make belief in God reasonable by solving the opposing difficulties – without recurring to faith in God's self-revelation. Put as a theoretical problem of logical consistency, there seems to be a contradiction between different propositions concerning God's relation to the world. The alleged contradiction emerges on condition "that good is opposed to evil, in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can, and that there are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do. From this it follows that a good omnipotent thing eliminates evil completely, and then the proposition that a good omnipotent

[1] This is a shorter version of Epicurus' formulation of the problem, which David Hume has put into the mouth of Philo in Part X of *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779).

thing exists, and that evil exists, are incompatible."[2] Basically, there are two types of suggested solutions in order to avoid these contradictions:

1. First, the notion of evil could be weakened. This can be done, for example, by means of ontological arguments that deny that evil exists in and for itself; instead of being something, *malum nihil est* or *prope nihil*, nothing but a parasitical phenomenon that appears as a lack of goodness, as *privatio boni*. Or, according to epistemological arguments, evil is only a subjective and illusory impression that something is evil. Aesthetical arguments prettify evil as a necessary contrast that allows us to see and appreciate the harmony of the world as a whole, in which evil has an indispensable function – be it defined as creaturely imperfection and mortality, i.e. *malum metaphysicum*, as physical pain and suffering, i.e. *malum physicum,* or as evil we have done, i.e. *malefactum* or *malum morale,* also in the sense of sin or unbelief, *infidelitas*. Teleological arguments legitimize evil as a transitional stage within a dialectical process of historical development. Pedagogical arguments instrumentalize evil as a means to a better end, serving to educate us, making us more mature: πάθος μάθος, or: *per aspera ad astra* (which is less cynical if it is said in retrospect).

2. Secondly, the understanding of God could be modified through a redefinition of the attributes that characterize him. God's goodness, for instance, does not necessarily imply that God wills exclusively what looks good in our eyes; it could also imply that he permits some evils if they are inevitable for the sake of higher goods. God's omnipotence does not necessarily imply that God can do everything he wills; it could also imply that his power is restricted in this world, where he can only do that which corresponds with logical rules *and* with His goodness *and* allows human freedom to interact with him. On such grounds it can be admitted without reservation that there is evil; however, this is evil which is not at variance with God's goodness and omnipotence.

But even if the propositions 'God is wholly good,' 'God is almighty' and 'evil exists' are not logically incompatible, it is uncontested that this constellation contains a dissonance. Already after the Lissabon earthquake in 1755 and all the more after Auschwitz, the optimism of theodicies that try to harmonize even the most horrendous evils with God's goodness has become suspect. The suggested solutions and the standard presentation of the problem have become problematical themselves.

The problem has been presented as a puzzle that can be resolved rationally – by rationalizing the relation between God and evil. Both types of solutions presuppose that human reason has the final say and is entitled to judge – without further appeal. The arguments justifying God in view of evil or

[2] Mackie, J.L., "Evil and Omnipotence" (1955) in: B. Mitchell (ed.), *The Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford 1971, 92-104, 93.

evil in view of God do, above all, justify the respective *understanding* of God and evil.[3] As a matter of principle, theodicies tend to minimize the scandal of evil by arguing for its intelligibility or necessity in general and in the abstract. They cannot acknowledge that we might be faced with particular evils we cannot make sense of, or with an excess of suffering that is definitely not necessary for a larger whole or a greater good, and does not bring about growth and character-development, but rather degradation and disheartenment. Theodicies are all-embracing theories that attempt to demonstrate that all is really right with this world, but none of them manages to cover any case occurring. Let me give two examples: The soul-making theodicy[4] provides no justification for the suffering of people who die young, before they have had any chance to respond to challenges and to master temptations, let alone for animal pain. The Free Will Defense[5] holds that not even God can cause a person to do freely what is right, but that libertarian free will is of such a great value that the risk of its misuse must be taken; however, even if God respects the free choices of his creatures, the appeal to free will provides no justification for evils caused by natural processes, such as hurricanes, which do not at all or at least not directly result from morally wrong actions.

In sum, theodicies can neither show that God has actually been good to a particular person in a specific situation, nor can they prove that he has overcome evil on the global scale or is able and willing to do so.

Would-be anti-theodicists who sacrifice the affirmation that God is able to overcome evil[6] and explore only how God himself suffers and shares the

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[3] For a historical overview of various arguments and counterarguments see the essays in Oelmüller, W. (ed.), *Theodizee – Gott vor Gericht?,* München 1990, especially 9-32.72-86; see also Ammicht-Quinn, R., *Von Lissabon bis Auschwitz. Zum Paradigmenwechsel in der Theodizeefrage,* Freiburg/Schweiz et al. 1992, 217-251; Janssen, H.-G., *Gott – Freiheit – Leid. Das Theodizeeproblem in der Philosophie der Neuzeit*, Darmstadt ²1993; Geyer, C.-F., *Leid und Böses in philosophischen Deutungen,* Freiburg im Breisgau et al. 1983. For further discussions see Wagner, H./Menke, K.-H. (eds.), *Mit Gott streiten. Neue Zugänge zum Theodizee-Problem*, Freiburg im Breisgau et al. 1998; Oelmüller, W. (ed.), *Worüber man nicht schweigen kann. Neue Diskussionen zur Theodizeefrage*, München 1994; Geyer, C.-F., *Die Theodizee. Diskurs, Dokumentation, Transformation,* Stuttgart 1992.

[4] Cf. Hick, J., *Evil and the God of Love,* Houndmills ²1993.

[5] Cf. Plantinga, A., *God, Freedom and Evil,* London 1975; Plantinga, A., "The Free Will Defence" in: M. Black (ed.), *Philosophy in America,* London 1965, 204-220.

[6] Many of them refer to Jonas, H., "Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz. Eine jüdische Stimme" in: O. Hofius (ed.), *Reflexionen in finsterer Zeit. Zwei Vorträge von F. Stern und H. Jonas,* Tübingen 1984, 61-84. His lecture is the classic example of the reception of the kabbalistic idea that God renounced his omnipotence when he created the world. In Christian theology, the idea of God's *kenosis* and compassion is primarily connected with Jesus' crucifixion. However, if the idea of God's powerlessness is used to excuse his non-intervention that allows all kinds of cruelties to happen, one can rightly ask whether the price for his (deliberately chosen!) defenselessness is not too high, since it costs him many

burden of pain with his creatures are nevertheless engaged in the business of justifying God (or his helpless love) and do not solve, but intensify the problem of evil, which is not solved before evil is transformed into good and before pointless suffering is abolished, be it human or divine. Others refuse to defend God because they rely on the hypothesis of God's eschatological self-defense or apologia.[7] However, they either have to accept the euphemism that evil will turn out to be not as bad as it seems to be for the time being, which justifies it afterwards and ignores the question why God lets us wait so long until the sense of the seemingly senseless will be apparent, or they do hope, believe and trust that God can and ultimately will bring out good out of all conceivable evils, but this neither makes these evils good nor renders them explicable here and now.

If we are neither willing to give up the belief in God's goodness and creative power nor the recognition of the range of evils and the brokenness of his creation, then the most consequent alternative to theodicy consists in admitting that there are no satisfying explanations for why God permits evil to occur, in conceding that this question is completely legitimate but utterly unanswerable, and in being clear about what cannot be made clear – like the origin and purpose of evil in the good creation of a good and powerful God: "To be clear that there is a problem with no solution may not be very satisfying, but it avoids creating further problems."[8] This option involves a shift of emphasis: instead of seeking systematic coherence, we are to seek a way of dealing with disharmony that we cannot resolve into harmony and with the provocation of a theoretically insoluble problem. Admitting the fact

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suffering persons. See Levinas, E., "Judentum und Christentum nach Franz Rosenzweig. Ein Gespräch" in: G. Fuchs/H.H. Henrix (eds.), *Zeitgewinn. Messianisches Denken nach Franz Rosenzweig*, Frankfurt am Main 1987, 163-183, 170.

[7] In this line, some Christian theologians still wait for God's outstanding apology to his creation and see it as the task of (not only their) theology to call him to account, cf. Groß, W./Kuschel, H.-J., *„Ich schaffe Finsternis und Unheil!" Ist Gott verantwortlich für das Übel?,* Mainz ^{2}1995, 212f. A much more modest version of this extravagant expectation is the certainty that God's justice will become evident one day – without being judged and without judging according to human criteria, cf. Ebeling, G., *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens III: Der Glaube an Gott den Vollender der Welt*, Tübingen ^{3}1993, 518f, who identifies God's apologia with the *iustificatio impiorum,* i.e. the justification of human beings through God, who does justice even to sinners and makes them just even if they do not deserve it. In a personal conversation on this topic, Hilde Domin has drawn a good comparison: If we demand of God to apologize for what he has (not) done, then we treat him like a silly little boy from the neighborhood, who has been up to his tricks.

[8] This is the conclusion of Kilby, K., "Evil and the limits of theology" in: *New Blackfriars* 84 (2003), 13-29. Her article contains an illuminating critique not only of various types of theodicies, but also of contemporary criticisms of theodicy.

that we do not know God's reasons for permitting a given evil does not exclude the possibility that he has reasons for doing so, even if we will never grasp his plans here.

2. Between Good and Evil? Hermeneutical Considerations and Methodological Conclusions

So far, it has become obvious that the problem of theodicy cannot be solved by theodicies, for it concerns all dimensions of human existence (thinking, feeling and acting alike) and cannot be reduced to a purely speculative problem of coherence.[9] In what follows, I will (1) explain the epistemological and hermeneutical challenge and argue that it can best be met by a double approach that combines theology and phenomenology. Instead of defending the creator of the world (or the belief in his goodness, power, etc.) before the tribunal of human reason, and instead of inquiring into the origin and (non)sense of evil, my investigation will focus on God's (non)phenomenality. Further, I will (2) introduce a model of philosophy of religion in the sense of a philosophy of orientation, which can help us to come to grips also with the emotional and practical challenges.

1. The difficulty is that neither evil nor God's goodness can be seen 'as such.' Neither evil nor God's goodness is 'something' that 'has' a certain appearance or has a characteristic 'look' to it; rather, the interpretation of that which does appear is dependent on the observer who looks on it from his or her perspective. Evil appears only by means of something else and in relation to someone for whom a certain state of affairs appears *as* evil with regard to certain concerns. One and the same thing or event can appear as evil for one person in a specific position but as good for another person in another context. However, the relativity and perspectivity of value judgments is not to be equated with arbitrariness or indifference. Although the respective point of view is decisive for what we see and how we see it, there are conventional criteria that determine the formal characteristics of relations that can rightly be called 'good' or 'evil.' For instance, we can define 'good' as being equivalent with 'helpful to life' and 'evil' with 'harmful to life.' Take chemotherapy as an example: it possibly cures the person who has cancer, but could poison another person. It is even more ambivalent: on the one hand, it helps against a particular disease but, one the other hand, has harmful side effects. It can be experienced as good *and* as evil at the same time – by one and the same person.

This example shows that value judgments, far from being neutral, are

[9] Cf. Ricœur, P., *Le mal: un défi à la philosophie et la théologie,* Geneva ^{3}2004. I wish to thank Pierre Bühler for having called my attention to this little book. After having finished the dissertation without knowing it, I was surprised and pleased to discover the affinities between our answers to the challenge.

always linked to complex experiences. That is the reason why suffering can, but needs not necessarily be 'evil'; whether it is experienced as destructive or has also a positive meaning for those concerned is not to be decided by an observer on the outside but only from first person perspective. If the sufferer him- or herself does experience it as harmful, then no one else has the right to declare it healthful. The sufferer's self-understanding in relation to what (s)he suffers decides upon its evaluation. An experience is not just a collection of sense impressions which is interpreted afterwards; rather, the experience itself is a way of seeing-as. In experiencing something, it acquires the meaning we give to it. The meaning we contribute to what we live through can, however, change in the course of life and experience.

How are these ambivalent experiences related to God? Provided that it is not legitimate to infer from their ambivalence to God's non-existence, how can we know whether he is good or evil or both? Does the fact that he also permits negative experiences tell anything about God and the way he relates to us? The aforementioned definition of 'good' and 'evil' has an interesting implication: While anything that exists can be judged as (at least potentially) 'evil,' i.e. while 'evil' can be attributed to everything, 'evil' understood as a noun or nominalized adjective cannot be substantive, cannot exist independently as a reality or entity in itself, since it would destroy its own life. Evil can only occur together and in conflict with what is good and beneficial. Therefore, it can only be perceived *in* or *at* something else, forming a contrast to it; or it is hidden *sub contrario.* It is this ambiguity which makes it so difficult to discern it – in principle it could be found everywhere, even in God. However, the relation between good and evil is not symmetrical; evil always participates in the good on which it lives, but the reverse is not true, since life is not dependent on the negation of life. Consequently, evil cannot be identical with the absolute, whereas the absolute can well be identical with the good, relating itself to something that is different from itself.

Let us suppose that this relation is creative. If we hold fast to the idea that a good God creates, wills and achieves only the good – whence then is evil? The question is still open. Or shall we assume that a good God creates good *and* evil, or that the good he has created cannot but become ambivalent as soon as a plurality of moral agents with competing interests have to interact? On the one hand, the latter assumption does not explain why a good God should not intervene in heinously evil actions, if he has the power to prevent them. Besides, if the creation of a virtuous sinless world were impossible, then the promise of a new world where evil will be defeated would be a lie; but if such a world is possible and God plans to realize it, why was our world not also made this way? Apparently, God does not exercise controlling power upon his creation. On the other hand, if we acknowledge that we are given competence for free actions, should we not also acknowledge that it is *we*

who are responsible for these actions and their effects, not God? Theodicies, however, treat him not only like an agent among other agents, but also as a sort of super-agent, whose plan for the world is the reason why things happen as they do, who is accused whenever we experience something that we think we do not deserve, who is responsible also for the misuse of our freedom and whose morality is to be judged by us. But is this a correct depiction of God's relation to the world, and are we entitled to judge him according to some utility principle, and to call him 'good' as long as he seems to make himself useful for us, and 'evil' whenever things are otherwise than we wish them to be?

Neither can the logical possibility that God is identical with goodness justify evil as an allegedly 'indispensable' counterpart to the good, nor can God's goodness simply be deduced from our ambivalent experiences. If God is not to be confused with the world, our experiences in and of this world cannot be identified with experiences of God himself; rather, we experience everything else in the light of our respective ideas of God. These ideas can neither be verified nor falsified empirically. This causes epistemological problems. It is possible, but not at all provable, that God loves his creatures, that he wills the best and transforms evil into good – why should anyone believe this rather than the opposite, or believe in disbelief?

Theology (understood in the widest sense of the word: as speech of, about and to God, or the critical reflection on this speech respectively) and phenomenology alike are confronted with the hermeneutical question of how to interpret that which appears as ambiguity. Phenomenology describes everything that appears and presents itself to consciousness in the 'how' of its experiential (cognitive, emotional, perceptual, sensory…) givenness, that is, as a phenomenon. Whatever can be experienced in this broadest sense of the term provokes a process of acquiring implicit or explicit beliefs on which we act and form our lives. But not only phenomenology deals with 'phenomena'; theology does so as well. Σῴζειν τὰ φαινόμενα[10] – save the appearances! – could be the program of both of them, be it elaborated in scientific or soteriological interest. Yet phenomena appear in complicated ways and are, or at least appear to be complicated. What reveals itself in appearing also conceals itself: φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ.[11] Speaking of

[10] The original context of this dictum by Aristarchus of Samos is astronomical, and has to do with celestial phenomena.

[11] Heraclitus, Fr. 123, Themistius *Or*. 5, p. 69 D., in: *The Presocratic Philosophers. A Critical History With A Selection of Texts,* ed. G.S. Kirk/J.E. Raven, Cambridge 1957, 193. Cf. Heidegger's comment on φύσις ("das ständig Aufgehende," "das immerwährend Sichentbergende" – not: "das Wesen, das ὅ τι, das Was der Dinge") and on the whole fragment (in the following translations: "Das Sichentbergen liebt das Sichverbergen." – "Das Aufgehen ist als solches je schon dem Sichverschließen zugeneigt." – "Das Aufgehen (aus dem Sichverbergen) dem Sichverbergen schenkt's die Gunst."), in: Heidegger, M.,

God, we are not only faced with the ambiguity of the phenomena of our life and world. In addition to the phenomenological 'game of hide-and-seek' we are faced with the task of relating God's (non)phenomenality, that is to say, his transcendence that becomes ambiguous as well, as soon as it appears and thereby becomes immanent, to this ambiguity of the worldly phenomena and the subjects to whom they appear. God's transcendence can appear either *in* or *in contrast to* these appearances. The problem of theodicy is concerned with this double ambiguity of appearances.

Theodicies function as interpretation stoppers. They operate with predetermined propositions, which shall be brought in accordance with each other, and of course there can be only a limited number of constellations that meet this requirement. This makes them not only a bit boring over the years, but – and this is the much more serious problem – it makes them miss the phenomena instead of saving them. As announced at the beginning, this study seeks alternative solutions to the problem that do not end up in a theodicy. What is required, if this enterprise is to succeed, is both the tolerance of phenomena that appear in unusual ways and the passion of distinction that discerns between the ambiguity that can and should be dissolved in clarity, and the ambiguity that is unavoidable and remains unresolved. Affirming the need of ever-new interpretations of the ambiguous appearances, in which God can reveal or conceal himself, I will finally outline how theology could be developed as a 'phenomenology of the Invisible.'

2. Given that no idea of God can be compared with God himself, what could serve as a discriminatory criterion that would allow to judge whether a particular idea of God is more or less appropriate than another idea? I suggest choosing a pragmatic criterion, namely the prospect of orientation these ideas might offer to persons in particular positions. Orientation is the ability to find one's way – be it a road or one's own way of life –, the capability of acting both in familiar and in new situations, which is the prerequisite for crisis management. In order to apply this criterion, we have to examine the retroactive effect that this or that idea of God and his relation to evil has or will have on the life of the respective person(s) relating to it. This suggestion presupposes that it makes a difference whether one interprets evil and suffering in the light of, e.g., the idea of a malevolent or a benevolent God – a difference that has consequences for one's own self-understanding and behavior.

The biblical story of Job shall serve to illustrate this: Job is described as an upright man who eschews evil and lives a flourishing life as God's friend

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Vorträge und Aufsätze, Pfullingen ^{6}1990 (= *VA*), 259-267. Heidegger's translation seems to be more adequate to me than the more literal one: "Die Natur liebt es sich zu verstecken." See Diels, H., *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker. Griechisch und Deutsch,* Berlin ^{2}1906, 79.

– until he experiences a disastrous series of misfortunes that befall him through no fault of his own: his whole property is destroyed, all his children are killed, and his body is stricken with sores from head to toe. He cannot help considering God to be responsible for the infliction of great harm upon him, although he cannot understand why God should have done so. Job is forced to reorient his life in relation to a God, who seems to have become his enemy (cf. Job 10). His friends try to excuse God, and accuse Job of being, himself, responsible for his suffering. However, *their* explanations do not help *him* to come to terms with what he goes through. What is at stake is the twofold question of how to cope with what is experienced as evil, and of how to maintain a relationship with God under these circumstances. At first sight, it seems as if the second part of the question could be evaded if we would say goodbye to God, deny his existence and leave a blank space in his place; but then it would be we (or something else) who inherit his role and responsibility. The problem would only be shifted, and would return on another level. If we should manage to ignore or forget God completely, we would not be faced with the problem of *theo*dicy anymore, but we were still faced with the problem of how to cope with the evil we suffer or we do to others. However, as long as the word 'God' exists in our language, we inevitably shape some kind of relation to what we conceive of 'God' and are also confronted with the question of how 'God' is related to our problem of evil. Everyone can, of course, decide not to think about the problem of theodicy, but no one, neither atheists nor theists nor non-theists, can get rid of its existential dimension.

In everyday life, dealing with the problem of theodicy requires a continual coordination of (1) technical, (2) practical, and (3) theoretical efforts, i.e. the interplay between (1) the instrumental exercise of skills according to a guiding idea and as means to a certain end, (2) informed and committed action as an end in itself, including the ability to see the right thing to do in the circumstances, and (3) the critical reflection on both means and ends. None of these three modes of conscious action can be reduced to one of the others; rather, they condition each other. This distinction leans on the legacy of Aristotle, but also deviates from it. According to the threefold classification of disciplines in *The Nicomachean Ethics,*[12] the τέλος or purpose of theoretical disciplines is the contemplative attainment of knowledge for its own sake, the purpose of practical disciplines dealing with ethical and political life is practical wisdom, and the purpose of productive disciplines is to make something. However, while Aristotle tends to privilege contemplative

[12] Cf. Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* with an English translation by H. Rackham (Loeb Classical Library 73), Cambridge/London [12]1994 (= *NE*), the translation by W.D. Ross (http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au), as well as the article on Aristotle's ethics by R. Kraut in the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-ethics).

thought, i.e. the philosophic activity (cf. *NE* X, 7-8), I would prefer to combine θεωρία, φρόνησις and τέχνη in a control circuit or feedback loop of modified world – new thoughts – new modification, etc. Whether it is true or not that unalloyed happiness is available to us only when we study the rational order of a world more orderly than ours, we nevertheless have to act in the all-too-human world we inhabit. This is always risky and requires prudent practical judgments about what is best in *this* situation.

All theories are limited in that no theory can help us to apply this very theory. Only through practice can we acquire those deliberative, emotional and social skills that enable us to translate the universal into the individual and to put general principles into practice in ways that are suitable to each occasion. Even if we do not act according to any theory, all we do is always already determined by a certain understanding of other persons and the situation in which we are. Concrete commitment – like, for example, identifying injustices, uncovering their causes and struggling against them, comforting and supporting those who are grieved, working for reconciliation – is always done in a certain attitude that expresses our point of view. The simple description of something as 'evil' as well as the most elaborate explanation of the relation between God and evil inevitably entails an (implicit or explicit) interpretation which orients both our deliberate action and our spontaneous and involuntary reactions.

How might we cope with suffering, if it cannot be avoided, and what has God to do with it? How can we cope with actual evils in our own lives, and in the lives of others? These are vital issues, age-old questions that, sooner or later, arise anew in every single human life. They find as many responses as there are situations in which human beings are confronted with them. Job's case shows that no one can respond to the questions in place of someone else. Does this imply that evil and/or suffering[13] can only be dealt with by the respective person him- or herself? On the one hand, everyone has to take responsibility for the way (s)he actually reacts, even if someone else gives advice as to how one should ideally handle the case. On the other hand, there can be cases in which the persons concerned would not say that they suffer, or they do not notice that they are involved in something that is evil for other persons (and, due to the interpersonal connectedness, very probably also for themselves, although the repercussions of their actions might not be felt immediately), or they notice it but do not admit it. In these cases, an uninvolved, outside observer can judge more clearly what is going on than the person(s) concerned. The definition of suffering, of evil, of the evil of suffering, of suffering evil and the difference between evil and

[13] For a terminological analysis of (and differentiation between) evil and suffering cf. Dalferth, I.U., *Leiden und Böses. Vom schwierigen Umgang mit Widersinnigem,* Leipzig 2006 (= Dalferth 2006c), 11ff.

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