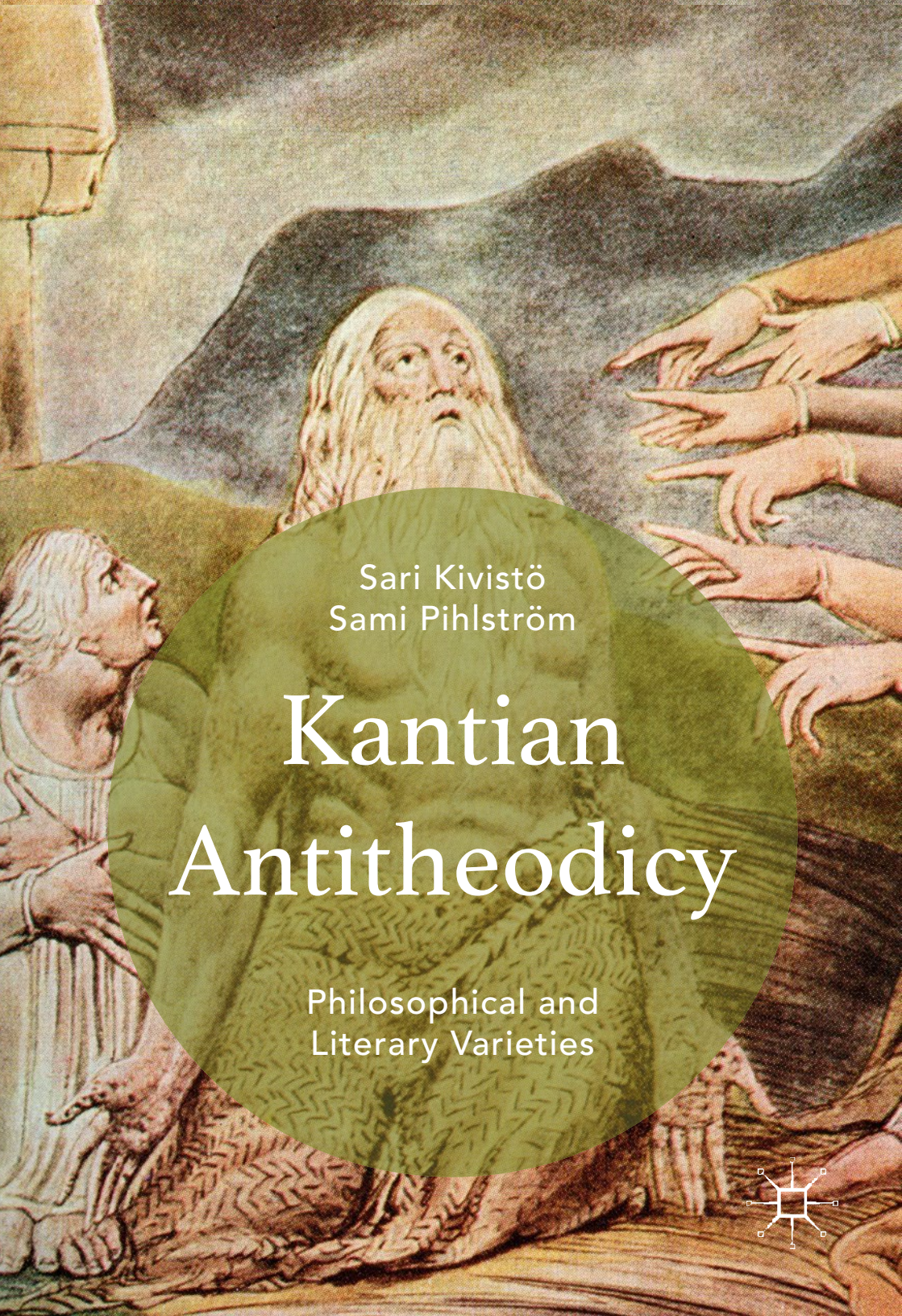

Sari Kivistö
Sami Pihlström

Kantian Antitheodicy

Philosophical and Literary Varieties

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Chapter 1 was partly presented by Sami Pihlström as guest lectures at Åbo Akademi Philosophy Research Seminar and the University of Helsinki Moral and Political Philosophy Seminar (March 2015), at the Philosophy Colloquium of the University of Tübingen (October 2015), as well as in the ethics lecture series at Joensuu Central Hospital (January 2016).

The early Kant sections of Chap. 2 were presented by Pihlström at the 12th International Kant Congress (University of Vienna, September 2015) and in much more detail at the Kant Reading Day (University of Tübingen, February 2016). Related conference papers titled "Theodicy as a Failure of Recognition" and "The Aesthetics of Antitheodicy" were presented (jointly by both authors) at the conferences, *Issues of Recognition in Pragmatism and American Transcendentalism* (University of Helsinki, December 2015) and *The Cultivation of the Aesthetic Imagination* (Kyoto

University, March 2016). Sari Kivistö delivered a guest lecture on "Job's Sincerity and Insincere Narratives" at Paideia Society, University of Turku (April 2016).

Chapter 3 is partly related to Pihlström's conference paper, "Forgiving God and Forgiving Human Beings", presented at the symposium, *Reconciliation and Forgiveness* (Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, June 2015); related material was presented by Pihlström at the UBIAS Intercontinental Academia, *Time* (University of Nagoya, March 2016). Pihlström's keynote talk at the European Philosophy of Religion Conference, *Evil*, in Uppsala (August 2016) is also connected with this topic.

The parts of Chap. 5 dealing with pragmatism are partly based on Pihlström's presentations at the *Philosophy as Translation* symposia co-organized with Naoko Saito (Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, November 2014; UCL Institute of Education, London, February 2015); related conference papers were presented by Pihlström at the Nordic Society for Philosophy of Religion Conference, *The Origins of Religion* (University of Helsinki, June 2015), the Second European Pragmatism Conference (ENS, Paris, September 2015), and a conference on the argument from evil in analytic theology (Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule Sankt Georgen, Frankfurt am Main, September 2015).

Chapter 6 is related to Pihlström's guest lectures on "Transcendental Antitheodicy" at Forschungsstätte der Evangelischen Studiengemeinschaft in Heidelberg (February 2016) and at the University of Helsinki History of Philosophy Seminar (May 2016).

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Helsinki, May 2016
Sari Kivistö & Sami Pihlström

Contents

1

Introduction

This book defends what we propose to call *antitheodicism* through historical and systematic discussions of what we find its most interesting versions, both literary and philosophical. Generally, we may say that *theodicies* seek a justification, legitimation, and/or excusing of an omnipotent, omniscient, and absolutely benevolent God's allowing the world (His creation) to contain evil and for allowing humans and other sentient beings to suffer. Classical formulations can be found, for example, in Augustine's appeal to God's having created human beings with the freedom of the will as the reason why there is evil, articulated in his *Confessiones* and *De civitate Dei*, and in G.W. Leibniz's view, formulated in his famous *Théodicée* (1710). According to Leibniz, God could not have created any better world than the one he, as omnipotent and absolutely good, did create; hence, we live in the best possible world, and while there is some evil there, it is necessary for the overall good.[1] By antitheodicism we mean the rejection of any such, or indeed *any*, theodicies, or better, of the very project of theodicy.

Our study is based on a somewhat unusual double perspective provided by literary criticism and theory, on the one hand, and philosophy, on the other hand, for approaching the problem of evil and suffering through a critical analysis of certain (philosophical and/or theological) texts and characters constructed and represented in them, beginning with Kant's 1791 Theodicy

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Essay and its most important pre-text, the Book of Job, and moving on to modern philosophy and literature. This methodology opens a novel perspective on the issue of theodicy versus antitheodicy. Our approach differs from the more standard ways of examining philosophical ideas expressed in literature (e.g., in works of such writers as Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Samuel Beckett, and Siri Hustvedt, among many others). In the cases discussed here, the use of literary figures and characters in a philosophical argument, rather than *vice versa*, is central. Our discussion of the problem of evil and (anti-)theodicy seeks to show that certain ways of writing—especially of authoring a theodicy—could themselves be argued to exemplify moral vices and thereby to contribute to evil, instead of excusing or justifying it. That is, even intellectually outstanding academic contributions to the problem of evil may be vulnerable to devastating ethical critique.[2]

Theodicies: Still Going Strong

The mainstream approach to the problem of evil in contemporary Anglo-American (broadly analytic) philosophy of religion is, arguably, strongly *theodicist*. By "theodicism" we may refer to all those attempts to deal with the problem of evil that regard theodicy as a desideratum of an acceptable theistic position, irrespective of whether they end up defending theism or rejecting it.[3] The theodicist can, then, be an atheist, insofar as he or she concludes that God does not exist (or probably does not exist, or that there is no justification for the belief that God exists) precisely because the theodicist desideratum cannot be fulfilled. Also those who offer a mere "defense"—instead of a theodicy proper—can be regarded as theodicists in the sense that they also seek to defend God and account for God's justice by arguing that, for all we know, God *could* have ethically acceptable reasons to allow the world to contain evil, even on the massive scale familiar to us.[4] Accordingly, the theodicist project in contemporary philosophy of religion (which we obviously cannot review in any detail here) is not restricted to those thinkers who offer us explicit theodicies, such as Richard Swinburne (defending a version of the "free will theodicy") and John Hick ("soul-making theodicy")—in most cases with an admirable history going back to, say, Augustine and Irenaeus, respectively—but also includes those philosophers who provide us with mere "defenses". The latter include,

for example, Alvin Plantinga and Peter van Inwagen, according to whom the "free will defense" must be carefully distinguished from any "free will theodicy". The theodicist project includes even those philosophers, such as Marilyn McCord Adams, who reject all standard theodicies as morally unacceptable "instrumental" justifications of evil but still appeal to something like postmortem "beatific" metaphysical divine compensation for the injustices and sufferings of the empirical world.[5]

Moreover, theodicism and *evidentialism* are closely connected. As mainstream philosophy of religion today is relatively strongly evidentialist (in a broad sense), it is also understandable that it is strongly theodicist whenever dealing with the problem of evil. That is, evil is in most cases seen as an empirical premise challenging the theistic belief in an argumentative exchange searching evidence in support of, or against, the theistic hypothesis. This is so irrespective of whether the problem of evil is regarded as a logical or as an evidential problem.[6] Just like theodicism is a normative view according to which any rationally acceptable theism ought to formulate a theodicy (or at least take steps toward the direction of a theodicy by formulating a skeptical defense), evidentialism is a normative epistemological view according to which any rationally acceptable theism ought to be defended by means of evidence.

Theodicism is, then, a specific dimension of evidentialism: it tells us how we should discuss the problem of evil when evil is regarded as a piece of evidence against theism that the theist needs to deal with. Note, however, that we are not claiming that there is any straightforward logical entailment relation between theodicism and evidentialism. We may in principle allow the possibility of positions that are theodicist and antievidentialist, or antitheodicist and evidentialist, because evidentialism could be locally, rather than globally, applied, and it is not necessary to apply it to the problem of evil even if one embraces theodicism. But in most cases the two do go very well together and are natural companions. Therefore, our criticism of theodicism is relevant (though by no means decisive) against evidentialism in general.

This book adds relatively little to the detailed assessment of the abovementioned and other theodicies and defenses going on in mainstream analytic philosophy of religion addressing the "argument from evil".[7] Indeed, we are not examining here the argument *from* evil at all, that is, the problem of evil understood as an argument against theism based on the empirical premise that there is evil in the world. A reader who seeks new

formulations of, say, the free will defense or its counterarguments will be disappointed, as will anyone who hopes we could illuminate the notion of divine intervention or the metaphysics of postmortem existence that could compensate earthly sufferings. Those discussions in analytic philosophy of religion in particular are full of intellectually extremely sharp contributions, as well as entanglements of philosophical and theological approaches. Much of that, however, is irrelevant to our concerns in this book—except as a background to which we will react critically. We will therefore also not claim to do justice to all those discussions and the nuances in the theodicies and defenses that have been put forward or in the criticisms launched against them; our criticism of theodicies is not exhaustive, as several relevant contributions are inevitably neglected. Philosophers like D.Z. Phillips and Richard Bernstein have already done enough to lay theodicies to rest, and we will definitely refer to their and others' contributions in due course. What we will primarily criticize here is the theodic*ist* way of thinking in general. This is a metalevel undertaking—or, if you will, a *transcendental* examination of how certain concepts in our lives are so much as possible, of how we are able to view the world in certain (ethical) ways at all. Thus, we also hope to appreciate the fact that in many cases it is an individual's *life*—experiences of suffering, one's own or others'—that may lead him or her to see the meaninglessness of (all) suffering and to view theodicies as insincere or even morally scandalous.[8]

We will, therefore, examine *how* to be an antitheodicist—how to take evil seriously—and how this influences one's entire way of being a moral agent. We will, in particular, show how an interplay of literature and philosophy can crucially enrich such an examination.

We will not only argue that antitheodicism is needed to counter theodicies (both theological and secular), but also, more specifically, examine the ways in which the antitheodicist is able to offer an essentially moral argument against theodicism, based on the idea that theodicies fail to adequately recognize or acknowledge the meaninglessness of suffering and typically treat suffering human beings (or, by extension, non-human sufferers) as mere means to some alleged overall good. In a sense, the concept of suffering is more important for our purposes in this book than the more abstract concept of evil—to the extent that while we occasionally just speak about "the problem of evil" for the sake of brevity, we always primarily mean "the problem of unnecessary suffering". As Ingolf Dalferth puts it,

suffering is the locus or context (*Ort*) of evil; whenever there is evil, there is someone's (or something's) suffering of some kind.[9] Acknowledging the reality of evil is always to acknowledge some concrete form of suffering. Indeed, a key antitheodicist point is actually that when the problem of evil is discussed at an abstract intellectual level focusing on the concept of evil rather than concrete sufferings, we have already taken the first wrong steps.

The actual antitheodicist arguments will unfold starting from the idea that theodicies are morally inadequate, or even immoral, responses to evil and suffering—failures of acknowledging suffering and the suffering other. While we cannot in a single inquiry offer full philosophical support for this premise—that would be an enormous task requiring a thoroughgoing critical analysis of not only all actual but presumably also all possible theodicies, and there is certainly no shortage of relevant scholarship in this regard—we will show through our carefully selected literary and philosophical examples what it means to be seriously committed to the view that theodicies are immoral. We will, accordingly, seek to demonstrate how one can, or should, be an antitheodicist.

There are several different ways in which theodicies may be seen as failures of acknowledgment. They may fail to recognize or acknowledge (1) the suffering individual (e.g., the victim of evil, individual or collective); (2) the sufferer's experience of his or her suffering; (3) the sincerity[10] of that experience, or his or her communication, report, or account of it; or (4) the sufferer himself or herself as sincere (as exemplifying sincerity) and as, thus, an intellectually and morally integrated subject. All of these are different versions of failing to acknowledge what can be simply called "the reality of suffering". All of them will be illuminated through our literary examples in particular. Furthermore, as we will suggest in Chap. 6, it is also possible—or perhaps even unavoidable—to fail to acknowledge (5) the impossibility of ever fully acknowledging another human being's, especially the sufferer's, individual perspective on the world (and on his or her suffering). Acknowledgment, we will argue, is most vitally needed when it is also necessarily limited.

In emphasizing the fundamental importance of moral acknowledgment of others' suffering, we will throughout this book search for an adequate moral language for addressing the problem of suffering. We will obviously be sharply critical of theodicist attempts to find meaning in evil and suffering, but our criticism, we want to emphasize, is primarily directed at our own—and by extension anyone's—theodicist temptations

rather than the specific authors of theodicies we will comment upon.[11] Our transcendental criticism of theodicies is therefore above all self-criticism, or criticism of the general human tendency that we ourselves undoubtedly exemplify as much as anyone else to either intentionally or unintentionally legitimize and excuse human suffering. We must speak of evil, because, as Susan Neiman wisely notes, "[t]o abandon talk of evil is to leave that weapon in the hands of those who are least equipped to use it".[12] By attempting to throw light on how we believe evil and suffering ought to be discussed, we take ourselves to be engaged in a task comparable to Neiman's defense of "moral clarity", an attempt to reclaim moral concepts without which we "will lose our souls".[13] A transcendental attempt to argue for certain necessary conditions for the possibility of occupying the moral point of view may not obviously sound like an attempt to save one's soul, but this—in whatever sense saving our souls may be a meaningful goal for twenty-first-century thinkers—is what our inquiry will ultimately seek to achieve.

The Importance of Kant

Why are we saying, then, that all the different antitheodicies comprehensively discussed in Chaps. 3–5 are "Kantian"? We have already referred to the "transcendental" character of our investigation. "How to be an antitheodicist" is a kind of "transcendental how question" analogous to the "how is X possible?" type of questions inherited from Immanuel Kant. One may imagine "X" being substituted here by explicitly Kantian concepts, such as "cognitive experience", or by concepts that are central in certain post-Kantian traditions, such as Wittgensteinian philosophy of language, for example, "linguistic meaning". In an analogous way, the Kantian antitheodicies we will explore will ask how it is possible to so much as adopt a moral perspective on the world we live in with other human beings and will seek the conditions for this possibility in the rejection of any theodicist thinking.

Kant's relevance for this inquiry is, therefore, not restricted to his being the first philosopher to explore evil from a resolutely *human*—antitheodicist, non-rationalizing—point of view. This anthropocentric

focus follows from his more general philosophical approach and set of problems—from the philosophical orientation that makes him the greatest of modern thinkers. For Kant, philosophical problems cannot be solved or even usefully discussed from an imagined God's-Eye-View; they have to be carefully, and often painfully, reflected on from a limited, conditioned, and inevitably contextualized human point of view. That reflection unavoidably brings us to a situation full of tensions. A key Kantian issue is whether, and how, there can be any deeper meanings—ethical, aesthetic, teleological, religious—in a world which in another sense is, as an object of knowledge and science, devoid of such meanings.

For Kant, this issue can only be examined *perspectivally*, in terms of a plurality of critiques of reason. (Philosophers and philosophies like pragmatism and Wittgenstein, considered in the later chapters of this book, are basically variations on this theme and these tensions.) It is against this background of the lack of any superhuman source of meanings, certainties, and legitimation that the problem of evil, and of (anti)theodicy, also receives its uniquely Kantian formulation—and is continued in, for example, pragmatism and Wittgensteinianism. Moreover, this is the sense in which our approach is clearly Kantian rather than, say, Hegelian. While Hegel is, one might suggest, a philosophical source of much (though not all) of contemporary theodicism, as the historical developmental process of the Hegelian absolute heals all wounds and "leaves no scars behind",[14] the antitheodicist, even if he or she is a pragmatist or a Wittgensteinian, is almost by definition also a Kantian. A further, perhaps more obvious Kantian feature of our inquiry is the refusal to accept any theodicism that turns sufferers into mere means to some alleged overall good, failing to appreciate the "humanity formulation" of Kant's categorical imperative, that is, the principle that we must always treat human beings, ourselves included, as ends in themselves, never as mere means.

The antitheodicists examined are Kantians also in the sense that they argue for antitheodicism *as a condition for the possibility of the moral perspective* (*or moral seriousness*) *itself*. In a certain sense, then, *only* an antitheodicist can occupy a morally serious perspective on evil and suffering. This is a strong claim and needs to be thoroughly articulated and defended, historically and systematically. It must, most importantly, be put forward as a transcendental thesis, not as a factual or empirical claim about people's

(theodicists' or antitheodicists') ability versus inability to engage in moral deliberation.[15]

We trust that antitheodicism generally is a plausible view; what needs to be argued more substantially is that it is the *only* ethically acceptable way of dealing with evil and suffering. What we are trying to argue is that antitheodicism is *constitutive of* a truly moral perspective on evil and suffering, and hence of morality itself, given that morality is largely (though admittedly not exclusively) a matter of responding to evil and suffering. It is not just one available approach among others but a standpoint needed for an ethical attitude to evil and suffering to be so much as possible. Antitheodicism changes the way we view the world in general; as soon as we recognize the reality of meaningless suffering and seriously set aside the project of excusing it—or excusing the world, or God for allowing its existence—our entire perspective on reality and especially the reality of other human beings changes. As this conclusion does not obviously or automatically follow from the more easily acceptable claim that there is something morally problematic about theodicies, we need a complex interplay of literary and philosophical examination to secure our thesis.

Yet another Kantian (albeit not exclusively Kantian) dimension in our argument for antitheodicism is our focus on the concepts of *freedom* and *necessity*. According to a theodicist logic, evil is in some sense necessary—if not metaphysically or theologically necessary (e.g., as an unavoidable element of the "best possible world" we live in according to Leibniz's theodicy), then at least instrumentally necessary in order for some "greater good" to be available in the grand divine (or secular) scheme of world history. In contrast, antitheodicism in its different versions—perhaps most explicitly in William James's pragmatist meliorism urging us to do whatever we can to make the world better, given that neither salvation nor destruction is guaranteed (see Chap. 5)—refuses to accept such necessities and emphasizes, on the contrary, the radical *contingency* (non-necessity) of evil. The evil and suffering there are, are to a significant degree grounded in free human actions, as Kant himself maintained in his theory of radical evil.[16] All claims about the necessity or unavoidability of evil, whether absolute or contextual, are either explicitly or implicitly theodicist, at least to some degree (assuming one can be a theodicist up to a degree), and it is this often hidden theodicism that we will argue against.

Literature, at least the works examined in this study (see the next section), often investigates the nature of individual human freedom—its conditions, nature, limits, and consequences. In the literary examples we have selected for further investigation, individual freedom is set against one or another overwhelming power of (theodicist) necessity crushing the individual agent and his or her freedom. Thus, the literary studies we engage in crucially contribute to the understanding of the dialectic of freedom and necessity right at the heart of the theodicism versus anti-theodicism controversy. Accordingly, we will show how even relatively technical ("Kantian") philosophical problems can be approached in terms of fictional literature—not just illustrated but genuinely examined by means of literature and its critical analysis.

One more Kantian aspect of our inquiry ought to be emphasized. When speaking of antitheodicism as a transcendental thesis, we are obviously comparing it with some of the key principles of Kantian critical philosophy that are also transcendental, that is, not empirical or factual but providing the conditions for the possibility of anything's being empirical or factual (for instance). However, it is with some caution that such comparisons should be made. We are not directly claiming, for instance, that our transcendental antitheodicism would have the same status as a transcendental principle as, say, the Kantian categories or the forms of pure intuition (space and time) that are, according to Kant's First Critique, necessary conditions for the possibility of cognitive experience of objects and events (and thus also for the possibility of object-hood in general). Possibly, a better analogy would be the somewhat weaker albeit distinctively transcendental status of what Kant in the Second Critique calls "postulates of practical reason".[17] They are, famously, the immortality of the soul, the freedom of the will, and the existence of God. According to Kant, these postulates cannot be transcendentally demonstrated in the same sense in which we can demonstrate the universal applicability of the concept of causation to all objects of possible experience, for instance. Yet the postulates are transcendentally defended as necessary auxiliary presuppositions without which our practical commitment to morality (demanded by reason) and to what Kant takes to be its key principle, the categorical imperative, would not make sense. Similarly, our antitheodicism is defended transcendentally as a condition necessary for our being able to make sense of our commitment to the moral point of view (or what we may call its seriousness). It may not hold "fully objectively" as a condition for morality generally—for,

for example, imagined beings very different from humans—but it is a fundamental moral requirement comparable to a transcendental principle for beings sufficiently like us, that is, the kind of rational yet finite creatures that Kant himself also addresses his critical philosophy to.[18]

Philosophical Antitheodicies and Literary Articulations

We may distinguish (in the contemporary discussion) between three fundamentally Kantian varieties of antitheodicism. A full chapter is devoted to each. Let us call these Kantian antitheodicisms (1) *Jewish post-Holocaust ethical antitheodicism*, (2) *Wittgensteinian antitheodicism*, and (3) *pragmatist antitheodicism*. They all consider theodicies to be morally inappropriate or conceptually confused or both; some of their representatives (e.g., Richard Bernstein) go as far as to maintain that theodicies are "obscene" and "scandalous" in their neglect of human suffering.[19] The literary works examined here are not merely background texts explicitly discussed in the philosophical arguments found within these antitheodicisms, or used as mere examples, but works that crucially illustrate and/or further develop the ideas of antitheodicy. Generally, one key literary text is chosen to "correspond" to one key philosophical text, tradition or approach. This does not mean that the literary work would simply apply the philosophical ideas found in the latter; on the contrary, one of the aims of the book is to (philosophically) demonstrate the intrinsic and irreducible value of literature in human life, particularly in the ongoing project of making sense of (albeit not justifying) evil and suffering.

What is common to all the literary works examined is that they somehow problematize the relationship between an individual human perspective and that of metaphysical, collective, or societal forces that aim to oppress the individual. Freedom is in many ways under threat in the works discussed here when unknown superior forces or humans themselves practice and justify their violence against the individual by appealing to the just ways of God or other obscure authorities whose reasons cannot be understood by a human mind. Suffering seems to be mindless and purposeless, yet at the same time it is an essential part of the human condition. We will examine the tensions that are created around the moral controversy of the experience

of injustice and suffering and the human, social or collective reasoning and justification of violence. We will explore the ways in which various authoritative and dominant voices (wrongly) appeal to good, holy or just intentions in their violent actions or to higher wisdom in explaining the reasons of unjust and painful experiences. The image of trial, among others, is a crucial metaphor in these discussions, representing a conventional form of justice. We will also analyze certain recurring patterns of non-narrativity that challenge the conventional forms of making sense of the world.

The discussion begins in Chap. 2 with Kant's "Theodicy Essay" (1791) and the Book of Job. What we hope to argue is that a certain kind of antitheodicist line of argument rather naturally emerges from Kant's Theodicy Essay when it is read with a focus on the literary characters familiar from the Book of Job.[20] Sincerity (*Aufrichtigkeit*) and truthfulness turn out to be key concepts for everything that follows, indicating an antitheodicist necessary (transcendental) condition for the possibility of ethics. Genre devices and different narrative patterns are important elements in constructing the argument in Job's story, and these literary features need to be studied further in order to understand Kant's views on antitheodicy. In particular, we will show how the Kantian criticism of Job's "friends" can be employed against contemporary theodicism. This criticism is not merely intellectual but essentially ethical: while Job's most important virtue, from the Kantian perspective, turns out to be his sincerity, the friends' theodicist vice is a certain kind of insincerity. This result will be crucial in the subsequent chapters focusing on the three varieties of Kantian (or post-Kantian) antitheodicism.

The discussion in Chap. 3 moves on to Kafka's *The Trial* (*Der Prozess*, published posthumously in 1925) and what we call post-Holocaust Jewish antitheodicism,[21] represented by philosophers like Hannah Arendt,[22] Hans Jonas, Emmanuel Levinas, Richard Bernstein, and Vladimir Jankélévitch. Both Kafka's novel and the philosophical literature we will refer to explore the ideas of incomprehensibility, inscrutability, and absurdity.[23] The unforgivability of evil—and the related question concerning our forgiving human beings and our forgiving God—will also be discussed, as theodicies could be regarded as attempts to forgive everything. Is post-Holocaust ethics an antitheodicist ethics of unforgivability?

The Book of Job and *The Trial* are closely related texts with many overlapping concerns; Kafka's Josef K. has been frequently identified

with a modern Job who is both the victim and the hero of the story.[24] Moreover, Kafka's novel is clearly an antitheodicist work, here linked to the post-Holocaust Jewish ethical paradigm. Both works are dominated by legal terminology to discuss moral agency, and the trial scene places not only the protagonists but also the reader in a godlike position where they have to make ethical judgments.[25] Both works also deal with questions of guilt, injustice and victims who are subject to higher transcendent powers and unjust suffering, thereby suggesting that the authoritative voices and established wisdom are corrupt since they are merely trying to maintain traditional authorities and conventional theories. However, we will examine how the moral situation also significantly differs in these two trial narratives; along with the views previously proposed, for example, by Stuart Lasine, we suggest that the court represented in Kafka's novel, in fact in its absurdity and arbitrariness, resembles divine justice which has (or could be taken to have) unknown reasons and which can judge without any either ethically or legally proper investigation or inquiry (Job 34:24). Josef K., for his part, although arguing for his innocence, may be considered fundamentally guilty precisely because he firmly denies his guilt and personal responsibility.

Chapter 4 of this book combines readings of Wittgensteinian antitheodicism and absurd literature. The "Wittgensteinian" philosophers relevant here include, among others, Rush Rhees, D.Z. Phillips, Peter Winch, and Raimond Gaita.[26] The Wittgensteinian perspective will lead us to examine the problem of evil and suffering in relation to such issues as the limits of expressibility and what can be called the transcendental limits of language and meaning. Theodicies may be regarded as both conceptually confused and religiously blasphemous, thus violating the rules of religious language-use. As an example of a philosopher attacking theodicies along these lines, we will primarily focus on Phillips. He is an excellent antitheodicist for our purposes also because he is more attentive to literature than most philosophers (of religion) tend to be.[27]

Absurd literature and the theater of the absurd in general approach the issues of personal guilt and responsibility by showing how the possibility of these concepts becomes obscure or impossible in a modern world. The use of these concepts presupposes an ordered world and meaningful human existence, which are called into question in absurd drama. As Friedrich Dürrenmatt has claimed in his essay "Theaterprobleme" (1955), tragedy

is possible only in an ordered world in which moral causalities take place and human beings bear responsibility for their actions; the tragic world is structured in a meaningful way.[28] In his view, absurd comedy and grotesque are more useful concepts than tragedy in interpreting the current world, since they capture the ambiguous and paradoxical spirit of the age where causalities and personal responsibilities have disappeared. In absurd drama, human life is often depicted as completely dissolute of any transcendent realm, and the experiences of meaninglessness and purposelessness stem from this sense of human isolation. Even language, when trying to reach metaphysical heights (and here is one obvious link to Wittgenstein) is drawn from the metaphysical to everyday use in absurd literature. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (written in French in 1952, English version published in 1956) is the key text examined here, as it explores the questions about the unfulfilled human desire for something to turn up, for signs of higher powers, some rational basis of things or a meaningful order, whereas the actual experiences of the protagonists record rootlessness and painful suffering; they mourn their situation basically in the same way as Job, although their suffering takes a different form of stasis and timelessness. The mysterious Godot is entirely absent, and keeping his distance, Godot is merely produced in the conversations between the main characters. Thus, the whole existence of this powerful figure is indebted to human belief, imagination and language. The play also approaches the limits of language—a fundamentally Wittgensteinian topic—when trying to reach for apparent meaning amid human life which is deeply unfair. Theodicy will be shown to be both confused and blasphemous here, as also argued by Wittgensteinian philosophers of religion such as Phillips. It offers apparent relief from the sufferings but no truth.

Finally, Chap. 5 deals with Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (published in 1949), one of the most disturbing novels in modern literature. Orwell is very important for Richard Rorty and thus for pragmatism more generally (but couldn't of course have been read by William James, whose pragmatism, especially as articulated in his 1907 book, *Pragmatism*, is the main topic of the early parts of the chapter). The concept of reality is crucial for our concerns here not only because we need to take seriously the shocking reality of suffering but also because the concepts of truth and objectivity are needed for the Kantian antitheodicy focusing on the concept of sincerity articulated in Chap. 2. Our reading of Orwell raises issues of self-deception as well as the loss of sincerity and truthfulness

due to the collapse of the truth versus falsity distinction; this could be regarded as the problem of realism in its existential dimensions.

The narrative pattern of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* also closely resembles that of the other works examined here in its antagonism between the individual and superior, infallible, calculating forces (an angry God, if you wish) that claim their ownership to truth by exercising power in order to gain complete control over individuals. The individual striving for truth is epitomized in the isolated character of Winston, who has been read as a righteous man who struggles for his soul against evil forces and bad angels.[29] He represents the perennial but futile rebellion against God, who presents absolute demands on man; Winston is forced to experience the power of Big Brother that annihilates all humans at the end. The work abounds in religious allusions, and Winston has also been compared with Milton's Eve in *Paradise Lost* who longs for knowledge and the forbidden fruit, and a modern Job who faces unjust assaults and whom the chastising Big Brother schools to his submissive role.[30] Through purgatorial pain and the healer's hostile hands (O'Brien is compared to a physician and a priest) Winston learns to accept his position and love his master. We will also show in Chap. 5 how, insofar as the distinction between truth and falsity collapses, as it does in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the very project of antitheodicy, which (as we argue in Chap. 2) is based on and depends on the Kantian notion of sincerity, becomes threatened. If a totalitarian world imagined in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is possible, we run the risk of losing whatever truthfulness we are capable of possessing. We may see Orwell challenging us to acknowledge the horrible possibility of evil that makes antitheodicy itself impossible by destroying the very possibility of Kantian *Aufrichtigkeit.* This *fragility of antitheodicy* is a crucial dimension of the more general fragility of the moral point of view itself.

The key idea in our intertwining of philosophy and literature is that literature can, by being constantly on guard against any absorption into a propaganda or linguistic corruption (Orwell), protect and cherish the kind of undecidability that prevents us from sliding down the slippery slope toward the loss of truth, or worse, of the possibility of truth. The corruption of language (i.e., dying metaphors, pretentious diction, meaningless words and mere conventionality, which Orwell condemned in his essay "Politics and the English Language", 1945)[31] we should fight against is also manifested by the philosophical theodicy discourse itself.

Literary works such as the Book of Job, *The Trial*, or *Nineteen Eighty-Four* may contribute to avoiding such corruptions. Literature, or art generally, can help us in maintaining the availability of concepts we need for morality, or moral seriousness, to be possible (e.g., cruelty, guilt, truth). Literature in this sense may also open up spaces of indeterminacy and openness itself, thus protecting us against the corruption of language that threatens to deprive us of the concept of truth itself (among other things).[32] This is also why the kind of collaboration between literary scholarship and philosophy undertaken in this book is vital for a successful articulation of a genuinely and thoroughly antitheodicist view that has any chance of making sense of the possibility of ethical seriousness and the unjustifiability of evil and suffering.

After the treatment of pragmatist antitheodicism in its Orwellian dimensions in Chap. 5, the concluding chapter (Chap. 6) will articulate a broadly Jamesian view on evil, suffering, and melancholy, basing antitheodicism in James's notion of the "sick soul" as employed in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902).[33] We will also summarize and further develop the idea of grounding antitheodicy in a transcendental argument invoking the very possibility of the moral perspective.

The literary works relevant to our topic are certainly not restricted to the ones we have chosen to consider in this book. Other obvious literary references dealing with theodicy and the problem of evil include, for example, Milton's *Paradise Lost* (to which we owe the phrase describing the task of all theodicies, "justify[ing] the ways of God to men")[34] and Voltaire's *Candide* (a famous critique of Leibniz's theodicy, in particular). Philosophical investigations of evil and suffering also often directly comment on literature.[35] However, Holocaust literature in particular, which is in most cases clearly antitheodicist (e.g., Primo Levi, Imre Kertész), will *not* be in the focus of this study. It can be seen as a literary background shaping our fundamentally melancholic attitude to the world in general (in relation to James's notion of the sick soul, for instance), but this book will not endeavor to make novel contributions to the analysis and understanding of the Holocaust, or literature based on the Holocaust. That again would be a huge scholarly task beyond the scope of our efforts here.

Our methodology, we hope, opens a genuinely novel perspective on the issue of theodicy versus antitheodicy. Our antitheodicist reflections

integrating literature and philosophy will show that theodicist discourse—whether it comes in the form of theodicy proper or, as is currently more popular, in the form of various "defenses", such as the free will defense—is entangled with the same kind of both ethical and intellectual difficulties (or, perhaps better, catastrophes) as the speeches by Job's friends or the theodicies that Kant crushes in his 1791 essay, or even Beckettian absurdities and Orwellian "Newspeak" that can be regarded as being insensitive to the suffering of, for example, Holocaust victims, as therefore breaching the limits of genuinely religious, theological or ethical language-use (Wittgenstein), and being deaf to the desperate "cries of the wounded" (William James).

It is presumably ultimately an existential choice, not to be settled by means of mere intellectual argumentation, whether to continue pursuing theodicist arguments (after all, it *might* turn out that not all argumentative options have been exhausted and that a sound theodicist argument emerges…) or whether to join, as we are recommending, the moral antitheodicists in maintaining that theodicies are scandalous and make moral orientation impossible.[36] Our argument can get only so far, never all the way to a final, absolutely conclusive refutation of all possible theodicies. But this is also one important reason why we need literature in this philosophical project, and need it profoundly, philosophically—to show us what our existential choice here is like, what it means to seek a resolutely antitheodicist orientation in one's life, and what is at stake.

A Preliminary Sketch of Our Main Argument

A sketch of our basic argument—or, more precisely, a set of intertwined issues and questions that we need to deal with in some detail in constructing the actual argument—can be presented as follows.

First, we will show that, and how, the Kantian project of antitheodicy, based on Kant's reading of the Book of Job (see Chap. 2), needs the notion of sincerity (*Aufrichtigkeit*) and hence presupposes the availability of the concept of objective truth. Secondly, we will examine how post-Holocaust ("Jewish"), as well as Wittgensteinian and pragmatist,

antitheodicies—discussed in Chaps. 3–5—offer different and complementary formulations of this sincerity (e.g., Hans Jonas's "rethinking God after Auschwitz", Jamesian appreciation of "the cries of the wounded") in full concreteness. They also develop the argument that theodicies are failures of acknowledging both suffering and the sufferer's sincerity, avoiding (like Kant himself) metaphysically realistic construals of objective truth, yet arguably continuing to presuppose the availability of the concept in an "ordinary" (Wittgensteinian) sense.[37]

Thirdly, however, it turns out that the (ordinary) concept of objective truth could be lost or fragmented in (at least) two ways: (1) O'Brien's way (for which *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a warning) and (2) Rorty's way (via his reading of Orwell). Chap. 5 offers an extended discussion of this issue, partly based on James Conant's criticism of Rorty. Fourthly, this investigation will lead us to the following question: Is there a slippery slope from Jamesian pragmatism (or even from Kant himself) to Rortyan neopragmatism and the threatening loss of objective truth? According to metaphysically realistic metaphysicians (such as van Inwagen, who also defends a traditional theodicist approach to the problem of evil), the slope starts with Kant, from *any* loss of full-blown metaphysically realistic truth. Is this slope particularly threatening when philosophers like James and Wittgenstein—opposed to traditional forms of realism—and their intellectual followers are integrated into the picture?

Fifthly, therefore, we need to ask: *where to stop along the way*? Is there any way of avoiding the slide into the loss of truth and the resulting loss of the very possibility of antitheodicy, which depends on the notion of sincerity or truthfulness? That loss would also amount to a loss of the seriousness of ethics itself, or at least to the loss of certain concepts whose availability is presupposed by our being able to be committed to the seriousness of the ethical at all. Note that this is, again, a transcendental issue, a matter of "transcendental availability", not a matter of empirical facts about our actual possession of certain concepts. Sixthly, we argue that possible stopping places are shown (perhaps only) by literature, which opens us new perspectives, new ways of viewing the world.

We will now start exploring this argument from its beginnings, the notion of sincerity as it emerges from Kant's reading of the dialogues between Job and his "friends" (and God).

Notes

1. Leibniz's classical theodicy is available in Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Essais de théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal* / *Die Theodizee von der Güte Gottes, der Freiheit des Menschen und dem Ursprung des Übels* (a French-German bilingual edition), in Leibniz, *Philosophische Schriften*, vol. 2, ed. Herbert Herring (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985).
2. Intellectual contributions can be evaluated in a multitude of different ways: epistemically and/or scientifically ("purely intellectually"), aesthetically, ethically—and in many other ways as well. That is, an intellectually extremely sophisticated exercise in theodicist argumentation can be ethically highly problematic. A book (for instance) written by a theodicist can be excellent in an intellectual sense while being bad, or even evil (even radically evil), in a moral sense. Of course it could be claimed that evil is not a useful concept here, at all. Philosophical or theological books as such rarely lead to atrocities, for example, but they may indirectly play a fundamental role in human actions. A widespread belief in theodicies may lead us to turn our back to concrete human suffering, if we believe that ultimately everything is, or will be, fine. They may thus contribute to the evil they themselves seek to excuse. However, from the fact that there are morally problematic intellectual contributions, such as (arguably) theodicist attempts to deal with evil, it does not follow, of course, that we should start censoring theodicist writings. We should definitely not start burning books, good or evil. Recall Heinrich Heine: "wo man Bücher verbrennt, da verbrennt man am Ende auch Menschen".
3. We are obviously aware of the fact that theodicies provide only a very limited perspective on the enormously rich explorations of evil in the theological and philosophical traditions. For an historical overview of Biblical and theological approaches to evil, see Hans Schwarz, *Evil*: *A Historical and Theological Perspective*, trans. Mark W. Worthing (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995). Schwarz concludes that theodicist attempts must always remain "incomplete and questionable" (p. 203). In this inquiry we will completely set aside the ancient

origins of the theodicy discussion; on an early formulation of the theodicy problem in Epicureanism, see Klaus von Stosch, *Theodizee* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2013), p. 10. It could also be suggested (here we are grateful to Lauri Snellman) that the theodicist picture of the divinity has its roots in Plato (see especially *The Republic*, 379c–d). See also Simo Knuuttila and Juha Sihvola, "Ancient Scepticism and Philosophy of Religion", in Sihvola (ed.), *Ancient Scepticism and the Sceptical Tradition*, Acta Philosophica Fennica 66 (Helsinki: The Philosophical Society of Finland, 2000), pp. 125-144, especially pp. 132-136, on the debates between Stoics and Skeptics regarding theodicy. The arguments formulated by Stoics like Cleanthes and Chrysippus (for theodicy) and Academic Skeptics like Sextus Empiricus (against theodicy) can be seen as precursors to the modern debates starting from philosophers like Leibniz and Hume.

4. These views often also come close to what is known as "skeptical theism". For an insightful critical examination of skeptical theism from a broadly antitheodicist point of view, see Ulf Zackariasson, "A Skeptical Pragmatist Engagement with Skeptical Theism", in Zackariasson (ed.), *Belief*, *Action and Inquiry*: *Pragmatist Perspectives on Science*, *Society and Religion*, Nordic Studies in Pragmatism 3 (Helsinki: Nordic Pragmatism Network, 2015), pp. 109–130; www.nordprag.org/nsp/3/Zackariasson.pdf.
5. For this broadly theodicist literature on the problem of evil, see, for example, Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978; 1st ed. 1966); Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006); Marilyn McCord Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God", *Aristotelian Society Suppl. Vol.* 25 (1989), 297–310; and Adams, "Ignorance, Instrumentality, Compensation, and the Problem of Evil", *Sophia* 52 (2013), 7–26. Plantinga's articulation of the free will defense is typically dated to his essay, "Free Will Defense", in Max Black (ed.), *Philosophy in America* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1965); see also, for example, Alvin Plantinga, *God*, *Freedom*, *and Evil*

(Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977). For a useful overview also citing German scholarship, see von Stosch, *Theodizee* (cited above). For some critical discussion of the theodicist orientation from a pragmatist and antitheodicist perspective, see Sami Pihlström, *Pragmatic Pluralism and the Problem of God* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), Chap. 5; and Pihlström, *Taking Evil Seriously* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Pivot, 2014).

6. On logical versus evidential formulations of the problem of evil, see William Rowe (ed.), *God and the Problem of Evil* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).
7. In its most straightforward form, the argument from evil seeks to show that the empirical reality of evil is logically incompatible with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and absolutely benevolent God. Major atheist philosophers, following J.L. Mackie's lead (see Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence", *Mind* 64 [1955], 200–212, anthologized, for example, in Michael L. Peterson [ed.], *The Problem of Evil* [Notre Dame, 1992], pp. 89–101), have employed the argument in this way. However, already Nelson Pike in 1963 argued against Mackie that God could have morally sufficient reasons for allowing there to be evil and that the claim about logical inconsistence does not hold. See Pike, "Hume on Evil", *The Philosophical Review* 72 (1963), 180–197. The discourse has therefore over the past few decades turned from the *logical* problem of evil to *evidential* considerations regarding the compatibility of evil and God's existence, in which the reality of evil is regarded as a premise in an inductive argument against theism. See, for example, Rowe (ed.), *God and the Problem of Evil*; cf. also Michael Martin, *Atheism* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press), 1990,Chap. 14; and von Stosch, *Theodizee*, passim. For an overview, see also Michael Tooley, "The Problem of Evil", in E. Zalta (ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2009), http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/evil/. In the German discussion, Friedrich Hermanni (*Metaphysik*: *Ein Versuch über die letzten Fragen* [Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2011], Chap. 5) joins the broadly Leibnizian tradition in claiming to solve the logical problem of evil but leaves the evidential (or, as he calls it, the empirical) problem open as irresolvable. However, he still approaches this

problem in a theodicist (and evidentialist) context, as potentially to be solved.

8. For instance, Hans Jonas, one of the post-Holocaust antitheodicists to be briefly discussed in Chap. 3, was led out of any theodicist thinking—and out of his original high regard for Martin Heidegger's philosophy—through the experience of Nazism (and Heidegger's commitment to Nazism). See Hans Jonas, *Erinnerungen*, ed. Christian Wiese (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), especially Chaps. 7, 11, and 13.
9. See Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Leiden und Böses* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2011). In a broad sense, human finitude and mortality could themselves be regarded as forms of (innocent) suffering, as human beings can experience their mortal condition as in itself meaningless and absurd. We will not, however, discuss the controversy over the evil or harmfulness of death in this book.
10. As we will show in Chap. 2, sincerity is a key concept in Kant's antitheodicy based on the Book of Job. For instance, the speeches by Job's friends manifest these different ways of non-acknowledgment and insincerity. Needless to say, there are also insincere reports on suffering, and insincere sufferers (just as there can be sincere attempts to formulate theodicies). This, however, is not at issue here.
11. Emmanuel Levinas speaks about the temptation of theodicy in, for example, his *Entre-nous*: *Thinking-of-the-other*, trans. M.B. Smith (London: Continuum, 2006), to be cited in more detail in Chap. 3. See the relevant chapter on Levinas in Richard Bernstein, *Radical Evil*: *A Philosophical Interrogation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).
12. Susan Neiman, *Moral Clarity*: *A Guide for Grown-up Idealists* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 2008), p. 371. Neiman is thus as critical of the abuse of the concepts of good and evil (in, e.g., the foreign policy of the G.W. Bush administration) as is Richard Bernstein in his *The Abuse of Evil* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005). The demand not to judge others' (e.g., theodicists') moral motives but primarily one's own is also emphasized by Neiman when she reminds us about the Kantian view that we don't even know our own souls (our moral or immoral motives), let alone those of others (Neiman, *Moral Clarity*, p. 330).

13. Neiman, *Moral Clarity*, p. 18.
14. See Richard Bernstein's critical discussion of this Hegelian view in the context of theodicy in Bernstein, *Radical Evil*.
15. We will return to the transcendental character of our antitheodicism more explicitly in Chap. 6. In its transcendental shape, our argument differs from, while sympathizing with, "mere" moral antitheodicisms, such as Terrence W. Tilley's criticisms of the project of theodicy in Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1991). Tilley insightfully applies the speech act theory to theodicist writings, usefully reminding us that we always need to be aware of what is actually intended to be communicated by a certain text—not only its substantial content but also the illocutionary force it carries with it. Thus, for instance, the Book of Job is, according to Tilley, a warning not to believe one could know God's reasons for allowing suffering. Theodicies are too often simply read as assertions, though actions are prior to texts, in Tilley's view. However, Tilley's criticism of theodicies seems to claim merely that theodicies are contingent failures: focusing too much on individual sin and suffering, they do not address, but actually efface and thereby contribute to maintaining, structural and social evils. Our level of analysis is different, because we are interested in how antitheodicism changes our entire way of viewing the world we live in and our ethical commitment to living with other people. The antitheodicisms we analyze, starting from Kant, all operate at a philosophical level more fundamental than Tilley's (in itself important) critique of theodicies as "evil". For another noteworthy moral critique of theodicism, attacking the "teleology of suffering" assumed in theodicies, see Nicholas Trakakis, *The End of Philosophy of Religion* (London: Continuum, 2008), especially Chap. 2; according to Trakakis, the theodicist attempt to offer a moral justification for God's permitting evil to exist—and to do so from a detached theoretical perspective—is not only morally confused but dangerous and "morally scandalous" (p. 29). While our argument is one response to Trakakis's call for a "meta-theodical" discussion of the moral scandalousness of theodicies, even Trakakis does not develop his antitheodicism in a transcendental manner. The same is true about the criticism of