Article

Memory and History: The Overcoming of Traditional Theodicy in Levinas and Metz

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Abstract: Grappling with the marginalization of the marginal in Western thinking, this paper sets up a dialogue between Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy and Johann Baptist Metz's political theology in order to learn from their thoughts on the suffering of victims. For both Levinas and Metz, the idea of theodicy as an explanation of suffering is linked to the ontological conception of time and history, and therefore useless and unjustifiable by nature. The essential question of this research is how to give meaning to the concrete suffering of humanity in order to redeem history from the concept of an evolutionary progress which limits the possibility of hearing the cries of the victims of history. This article will show how Levinas's and Metz´s rejection of traditional theodicy is closely related to the concepts of memory and history and, therefore, the paper will demonstrate how traditional theodicy becomes for both thinkers an ethical theodicy. Consequently, the ethical account of theodicy replaces the attempt to negotiate the goodness and power of God with the pain of human beings. From this perspective, ethics is shaped by a response to the cry of victims which summons the subject to understand freedom as limited and subordinated to ethical responsibility. In responding to suffering, philosophy and theology can meet beyond idealism and dogmatism.

Keywords: theodicy; ethics; suffering; victim; responsibility

1. Introduction

Lithuanian philosopher Emmanuel Levinas and German theologian Johann Metz share the same interest in doing justice to the victims of history and rejecting any attempt to justify the suffering of the innocents. Indeed, by overcoming the totalitarian model of historical time which conceals the particular experiences of pain and suffering, Levinas and Metz recover singularity and individuality in history. It is an attempt to go "beyond the universal judgments of history, that offense of the offended which is inevitably produced in the very judgment issued from universal principles" (Levinas 1969, p. 247). This novelty in history places philosophy and theology before the tremendous misery that these individuals have experienced particularly during the years of Nazi attempts to exterminate the entire population of European Jews.

Furthermore, since the Bible, according to Levinas, the prospect of an era of peace, justice, and liberty accustomed people to thinking that time was going somewhere and present misfortunes would have a final, happy ending. Therefore, the concept of theodicy as justification of suffering from the perspective of God has raised the hope that these sufferings are inserted into an "overall plan." According to Levinas, this theodicy is a temptation of man, which helps to maintain a certain tranquility despite the helplessness of life, and saves people from dealing with the abyss of suffering by justifying the unjustifiable.

While for Metz theodicy is fundamental, Levinas, in line with Kant, is reluctant to rationalize the pain and cries of the victims and for this reason he claims a theology without theodicy. Metz, however, points to a theodicy as a disturbing question and not as a comforting answer and in this sense, he is

responding to Levinas's preoccupation with the untold pain. Furthermore, for Metz, theodicy is critical to political theologizing, but it is understood as an open question that can never be fully responded to. Traditional theodicies attempt to defend God's goodness and omnipotence in relation to human suffering, whereas Metz understands theodicy as a troubling questioning unto God for suffering in the world. For Metz, this questioning discourse is the cry for the salvation of others, of those who suffer unjustly, of the victims and vanquished in our history.

Following this line of thinking, this article will show how Levinas´s and Metz´s rejection of traditional theodicy is closely related to the concepts of memory and history and, therefore, the paper will demonstrate how traditional theodicy becomes an ethical theodicy for both thinkers. There is no other work of this scope that brings Levinas and Metz into relation. However, in so doing, I am not trying to make equivalent or homogenize their complex philosophical and theological projects. Rather, I have sought to take advantage of their similar perspective in relation to history in order to explore responsibility for the victims of history and their suffering. In fact, both thinkers agree that the biblical spirit provides essential categories to deal with suffering, death, and justice. Furthermore, they share the same memories: the memories of the Holocaust which shape their views on suffering and death. From this perspective, both thinkers challenge the Western idealism of philosophy and theology by giving voice to the victims of history, acknowledging the concrete reality of suffering and death.

I will develop a critical analysis of the consequences of the concept of theodicy in relation to death and suffering, the myths of consolation in relation to suffering, and finally the concrete response to evil through ethics. Theodicy as an attempt to explain suffering is meaningless, and in Levinas's and Metz´s estimation, a source of immorality. Suffering is linked to evil and therefore useless; it is unjustifiable by nature. However, it is my contention that in Levinas' and Metz´s perspective, suffering, and therefore theodicy, can only find meaning in ethics. Suffering has meaning as a subject taking upon itself the suffering of the other human. The human encounter is opened up by the other's suffering.

This paper has three parts. The first develops a critical analysis of the consequences of Levinas´s concept of theodicy in relation to death and suffering, the myths of consolation in relation to suffering, and finally the concrete response to evil through ethics. I will show how Levinas initially rejects the concepts of memory and theodicy to the extent to which they stem from a temporality linked to ontology and they are therefore ignorant of human suffering. Suffering is linked to evil and therefore useless; it is unjustifiable by nature. However, suffering, and therefore theodicy, can find a meaning in ethics. Suffering has meaning as a subject taking upon itself the suffering of the other human.

The second part advances towards the problematization of Metz's concepts of dangerous memory and theodicy. From this discussion will emerge a subjectivity essentially bound to the other's death and suffering, and therefore a solidary and compassionate subject. From this perspective some confluences will be found in relation to Levinas's ethical theodicy. For Metz, the memory of the suffering of others, the story of the passion of men, is the only macro narrative that continues to be valid. Therefore, this memory does not refer to a memory that helps to assert and strengthen identity, but a memory that questions firm and secure identities. This questioning opens a fissure in subjectivity, compelling a response to the other's claim. In this way the suffering other becomes the authority that cannot be avoided and calls everyone to political compassion.

The third part concludes by pointing differences within an essential concordance between Levinas and Metz on the relationship between memory and theodicy. From this perspective, a fundamental asymmetry in human relationships derives. Asymmetry in Metz acquires the connotation of the authority of suffering, and in Levinas the appearance of the helpless other commands a responsibility.

2. Levinas's Ethical Theodicy

2.1. Memory and Suffering

Memory and the narration of past events, particularly the Exodus and the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, are essential elements of present Jewish identity which is celebrated in the quotidian

liturgy and prayer. Metz has rescued this characteristic of the Jewish psyche for Christian theology by pointing out that this memory is the basic category not only for a detachment of theology from idealistic philosophy but also for a political redemption of the past suffering in history. However, the concept of memory in history is criticized by Levinas, particularly in his 1974 book *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. In fact, in this work Levinas presents memory as the vehicle of representation through which the past is made present. In this sense, memory is totalitarian and ontological (Spargo 2006; Ombrosi 2011; Poleshcuk 2014; Losada-Sierra and Mandalios 2015). As Benso remarks, "Memory is an instrument through which the self anchors its present into the past: it appropriates the past which would otherwise remain other—unthinkable because unthought of—and puts an end to its alterity" (Benso 2003, p. 9).

However, is memory always ontological for Levinas? Levinas, in fact, refers to memory in various parts of his work, particularly when referring to the horror of the Holocaust. The same book *Otherwise than Being*, for example, is dedicated "to the memory of those who were closest among the six millions assassinated by the National Socialists, and of the millions on millions of all confessions and all nations, victims of the same hatred of the other man, the same anti-Semitism" (Levinas 1994b). Furthermore, in *Signature*, Levinas claims that his biography "is dominated by the presentiment and the memory of the Nazi" (Levinas 1997, p. 291). In an interview, when questioned by Bertrand Révillon about the Klaus Barbie trial, Levinas responds that "it is in the register of the dreadful. A horror that can never be repaired or *forgotten*" (Levinas 2004, p. 129). Furthermore, reflecting on his experience of the concentrations camps, Levinas defines it as a "tumour in the *memory*" (Levinas 1996, p. 120). In this vein, "the presentiment of these terrible years, the unforgettable remembering of those years" has been "a fundamental experience of my life and my thought" (Levinas 2006, p. 117). Furthermore, the denial and forgetting of the Holocaust, Levinas complains, is "[t]he final act of this destruction" being accomplished today "by the would-be 'revisionists of history'" (Levinas 1998a, p. 98).

Therefore, Levinas criticizes the concept of memory in the same way as he criticizes history and at the same time voices the worry about the possibility of forgetting the suffering of the victims due to the "virile" account of history. In Levinas's estimation "the past of the other concern me," but "it is not a representation for me" (Levinas 1998a, p. 115). Therefore, there would be a different way from that of the Platonic reminiscence to approach the past. This means that the past of the other is not an essence represented by consciousness, but it has its "own signification." This signification, in Levinas's estimation, can only be unveiled by the witness, by the other who suffers, as he says: "other shore the Other absolutely other . . . is alone capable of marking, and of connecting with the past" (Levinas 1969, p. 283). As James Hatley affirms "[f]or Levinas, memory of the other ultimately engages me in a past that could never have been mine" (Hatley 2005, p. 217).

Memory is therefore not an action of the subject's consciousness (representation), but a testimony of the victim. Victims carry their memory. In this sense memory is less the work of representation than a movement provoked by exteriority, by another who is not strictly subject to ideation or to the mournful survivors' perception. In Joseph Rosen's words, "testimony would bear witness to the alterity that is previous to the memory of the self" (Rosen 2006, p. 289). In this way the face would be protected from the objectivations of mnemic or historic representations. This is a memory of the immemorial in the sense that it is my hearing of infinity's call that occurs in the encounter with the vulnerable and suffering face of the other.

Levinas himself is an eyewitness and a victim, he is the other who testifies how it is "difficult to communicate . . . this kind of interrupted despair which was the Hitlerian period in Europe" (Robbins and Levinas 2001). In communicating his own memory, Levinas is loyal to his affirmation that "[t]he survivor of the "*Hitlerian massacres . . . is Other in relation to martyrs*. He is consequently responsible and unable to remain silent. It is impossible to remain silent" (Levinas 1997, p. 132). There is an obligation to speak. As Sandor Goodhart remarks "[t]he truth of testimony is not the truth of representation" (Goodhart 2005, p. 148). That is, the testimony of the victim is the voice of the other denying any attempt to explain or justify such suffering.

From these comments, it is also clear that Levinas rejects any attempt to look for an explanation of suffering (Geddes 2018). Simply the testimony, the cry of the victims, could wake up sleeping rationality to interrupt the perseverance of being in its being. This interruption of the *conatus essendi* (the effort to persevere in one's being) is possible when consciousness loses its first place and responsibility arises in subjectivity. That is, Levinas is claiming that consciousness plays a secondary role in the plot of history so that consciousness awakens to humanity. In Levinas words, "[t]he humanity of consciousness is definitely not in its powers, but in its responsibility," and the grand event of history is the apparition of the human. Therefore, it is the attention to the other which, across the cruelties of the twentieth century "can be affirmed as the very nexus of human subjectivity" (Levinas 1998a, p. 173). In other words: "[t]o be I and not only an incarnation of a reason is precisely to be capable of seeing the offense of the offended, or the face" (Levinas 1969, p. 247)

The openness of time to hope is also the message of the Talmudic commentary "Beyond Memory," from the Tractate Berakhot 12a–13b. In the Talmudic text, Levinas attempts to challenge the meaning of memory in Jewish life by looking for a new meaning of historical time. Past events continue to play a role in the Jewish psyche, that is, the Exodus cannot be forgotten. However, memory, in spite of the historical events experienced by Israel, particularly in the twentieth century, needs to be open to the new, to hope. In the Gemara, in fact, something new is announced:

> Does it not say in Isaiah 43:18, "Remember former things no more, nor consider the things of old?" "Remember former things no more," is [the emancipation] from subservience to the empires; "Nor consider the things of old" is the exodus from Egypt. What is the meaning of [Isaiah 43:19]: "Behold, I will do new things-See, they are already unfolding"? Rav Yosef taught . . . (Levinas 1994a, p. 83).

Levinas wonders "[w]hat are these new things" beyond memory? The answer is given in the text by Rav Joseph: "It is the war of Gog and Magog" (Levinas 1994a, p. 83). This war is described in Ezekiel 38–39 as a final end-times attack on Israel, a total war, the war "[b]eyond any memory" (ibid.). This final war ends up with Gog's defeat by God himself. However, eschatology in Levinas's estimation, is not the end of history, but the opening to the call of infinity in the vulnerability of the face. Openness to the face of the other is evident in the figure of Abraham. Having as a background the discussion between Bar Kapra and Rav Eliezer about the use of the new name Abraham instead of Abram, Levinas interprets the prohibition to use the old name Abram as a message about time. It is a time open, as Abraham's tent, to the arrival of the other, always unpredictable, trusting "new things and even the miracle required for universal peace" (Levinas 1994a, p. 86). It is a time when goodness hopefully rises facing the depths of despair, as Levinas affirms: "The 'I' of men, forced by suffering back into the shackles of the self, breaks forth, in its misery, into mercy" (Levinas 1994a, p. 89).

Therefore, memory as a tentative appropriation of suffering gives way to the memory of the immemorial from which the responsibility for human suffering stems. In fact, memory stemming from consciousness is unable to contain the pain of suffering. On the contrary, in the encounter with the suffering face of the other the subject feels itself subjected to respond instead of trying to comprehend or systematize suffering. In Levinas's view:

> The misery that calls out for our pity, our justice, our freedom and our work, is replaced by an ambiguous passion in which grief is transformed into ritual and sacrament, and unfolds like a scenario. It is as if its human meaning were not sufficiently full, as if another mysterious night enveloped the night of human suffering, as if some celestial salvation could triumph without ridding it of visible misery (Levinas 1997, p. 104).

This is why Levinas tries "to think time in the devotion of a theology without theodicy" (Levinas 1998a, p. 177).

2.2. The Holocaust and the End of Theodicy

Richard Bernstein has emphasized the central role that the experiences of evil had for Levinas's philosophizing. For him "Levinas's entire philosophic project can best be understood as an ethical response to evil" (Bernstein 2002, p. 252). Bernstein endeavors to prove that the primary stimulus of Levinas's thought is to be understood as his response to the evil that flared up in the twentieth century. Unlike Bernstein, Fagenblat considers that the "primary stimulus" is the Judaic tradition itself, and therefore "Levinas's philosophical works are midrashically determined from beginning to end" (Fagenblat 2010, p. xxiii). Ethics in Fagenblat's contention is "best understood as a secularized and generalized account of the Jewish covenant of faith" (Fagenblat 2010, p. xxv). Fagenblat however accepts that the Holocaust "touched Levinas personally, vocationally and intellectually" (Fagenblat 2010, p. xiii). Bernstein's thesis is insufficient to explain Levinas's entire philosophical project, toning down for example his encounter with Husserl and Heidegger and also the influence of Russian literature and the Bible. However, it is true that the experience of the Holocaust provides Levinas with an existential and essential stimulus to think about suffering and evil in history. This is why after remembering Levinas's dedication of *Otherwise than Being*, Maurice Blanchot, one of Levinas's closest friends, wondered "how to philosophize, how to write, in memory of Auschwitz, about those who said to us, oftentimes in notes buried near the crematoria: 'know what has happened, do not forget, and at the same time, you will not be able to'," and he adds "this is the thought that traverses, that bears, the whole of Levinas's philosophy" (Blanchot 1980, pp. 86–87). In this sense, Levinas affirms: "[i]f there is an explicitly Jewish moment in my thought, it is the reference to Auschwitz, where God let the Nazis do what they wanted" (Levinas 1998b, p. 175).

Levinas's experience of the Holocaust led him to criticize any attempt to intellectualize the experience of suffering of the victims. In the essay "Useless Suffering" Levinas describes the phenomenological condition of suffering to conclude that suffering is meaningless and therefore asystematic and beyond any intellectual comprehension. Agamben has expressed something similar when he affirms that "the aporia of Auschwitz is, indeed, the very aporia of historical knowledge: a non-coincidence between facts and truth, between verification and comprehension" (Agamben 2005, p. 4). Phenomenologically, suffering is an excess with a sensorial content. This means a datum in consciousness which, however, surpasses it as the unassumable. It is, in Levinas's words, "the ache of pain—evil" (Levinas 1998a, p. 92). This is why suffering is refractory to knowledge, to any synthesis of the transcendental subject, to the unification in a horizon of meaning. This suffering cannot be comprehended, systematized, or explained. It is the suffering of the innocents which "is very difficult to communicate" (Robbins and Levinas 2001, p. 39).

Suffering is, in fact, the meaninglessness: what shies away from rational comprehension. It is a denial of meaning which, in Levinas's terms, is "thrusting itself forward as a sensible quality" (ibid.). Therefore, Levinas rejects any attempt to give an ultimate meaning to suffering being understood as a way to conquer an end. It cannot be understood, for instance, as a deserved punishment for individual acts, or as a path towards a spiritual refinement and a strengthening of character. Nor as a way used by the state to maintain social cohesion and stability. None of these teleologies, individually or collectively, may account for the meaninglessness of suffering: neither history nor divine providence, that teleologically expect a happy end, is achieved after the necessary suffering.

The attempt to explain the suffering of the innocents, and particularly the attempt to come to terms with the omnipotence and goodness of God is per se "the source of all immorality" (Levinas 1998a, p. 99), the unjustifiable par excellence. Levinas's reading of suffering (gnoseologically never properly captured) would lead to thinking that it has a boomerang effect in Levinas's critique, to the extent to which he ends up glorifying the same suffering he declares meaningless. However, as will be shown later on, Levinas's intention is to move from the intellectual comprehension of suffering to an ethical response, meaning from a traditional theodicy to an ethical theodicy. In this way, if suffering cannot be explained and intellectualized it is because it compels a response before there is any attempt to explain it. It is only in this way that suffering has a meaning because it cries out for concrete commitment.

This is the purpose of theodicy: to find meaning in human suffering, either from religious faith or from the idea of progress. From a religious perspective theodicy is the seductive temptation "in making God innocent, or in saving morality in the name of faith, or in making suffering—and this is the true intention of the thought that has recourse to theodicy—bearable" (Levinas 1998a, p. 97). The basic question of religious theodicy is, as Bernstein says, "how we can reconcile the existence of evil with a faith in a God who is omniscient, omnipotent and beneficent—a God who is the creator of the universe and all living beings" (Bernstein 2002, p. 255). This question has been part of the European conscience, whose origins can refer to the Bible and its attempt to explain pain and suffering by way of sin. However, the twentieth century constituted a challenge to theodicy. The prevailing evil came to unimaginable proportions.

This is the century that in thirty years has known two world wars, the totalitarianisms of right and left, Hitlerism and Stalinism, Hiroshima, the Gulag, and the genocides of Auschwitz and Cambodia. This is the century that is drawing to a close in the obsessive fear of the return of everything these barbaric names stood for: suffering and evil inflicted deliberately, but in a manner no reason set limits to, in the exasperation of a reason becoming political and detached from all ethics. In this panorama, the Holocaust is particularly "the paradigm of gratuitous human suffering, in which evil appears in its diabolical horror" (Levinas 1998a, p. 97). The disproportion between suffering and theodicy is manifested in Auschwitz with blinding clarity. In this assessment Levinas is certainly very close to Metz who believes that Auschwitz is a horror situated beyond any known theology, a horror that makes all talk about God seem empty and blind.

In Levinas's estimation there is a direct relationship between evil and suffering. Suffering derives from evil and from it receives its more profound articulation as absurdity: "[s]uffering, extreme passivity, the foolish par excellence, absurdity, loneliness—misery and neglect. Solitude and confinement" (Levinas 1986, p. 17). This is why suffering is useless; it is "for nothing." In this vein, Arthur Cohen calls Jewish suffering in the concentration camps the tremendum, "for it is the monument of a meaningless inversion of life to an orgiastic celebration of death" (Cohen 1993, p. 11). To Cohen this is a suffering beyond comprehension. Levinas exemplifies this uselessness of suffering in some physical maladies in which abandonment and anguish are part of the cruelty of the suffering. It is a request for aid, for curative help, in which the immanence of psychism is ruptured to open to transcendence. This means that this phenomenological absurdity finds a possibility of meaning in ethics:

> must not humanity now, in a faith more difficult than before, in a faith without theodicy, continue to live out Sacred History; a history that now demands even more from the resources of the I in each one of us, and from its suffering inspired by the suffering of the other, from its compassion which is a non-useless suffering (or love), which is no longer suffering "for nothing," and immediately has meaning? (Levinas 1998a, p. 100).

From an ethical point of view, there is therefore a distinction between the suffering in the other and the suffering in me. The suffering in the other "solicits me and calls me" (Levinas 1998a, p. 94). This is why the useless suffering in the other only has a meaning "which is not possible to contest," that is, "the suffering of suffering, the suffering for the useless suffering of the other, the just suffering in me for the unjustifiable suffering of the other, opens suffering to the ethical perspective of the inter-human" (ibid.). This suffering for the suffering of the other is the very bond of human subjectivity. According to Levinas this is the supreme principle of ethics. It is the very concreteness of the 'horror of evil' that calls forth the ethical response that ruptures the persistence in being. The conatus essendi is ruptured by the messianic subject who takes the suffering of the other and offers help and comfort to him/her. Furthermore, it is only by ethically responding to the evil inflicted on my fellow human beings that I become fully human. Levinas elsewhere states that "to be human is to suffer for the other" (Levinas 1994c, p. 188). In Levinas's estimation the constitution of the unicity of the "I" is established through the subject's irreplaceability in relation to the responsibility for the other.

In relation to the problem of theodicy, Levinas derives from the failure of theodicy as traditionally understood, an ethical account of theodicy in which the discourse about evil and pain claims for an ethical commitment of the subject. This ethical account therefore replaces the attempt to negotiate the goodness and power of God with the pain of human beings.

3. Metz's Theodicy as a Disturbing Question

3.1. The Memory That Perturbs the Present

Similar to Levinas, Metz's consideration of memory has initially a biographical content. His memory of the experience of the war in 1945 profoundly marked his theologizing, particularly from the 1960s onward (Downey and Metz 1999).

In fact, from this biographical background, Metz expresses how memory plays a central role in his theologizing. For him, memory is a powerful tool that allows the logos of theology and philosophy to overcome idealism and to be critical towards the prevailing modes of logic of domination which gnoseologically, as Ostovich states, equate "knowing with control" (Ostovich 2005, p. 48), and historically ignore the presence of the vanquished. Memory "breaks through the magic circle of the prevailing consciousness" (Metz 1980, p. 90), in order for the oppressed to be regarded. That is, memory prevents us from interpreting history "simply as a history of success, triumph and victory" (Metz 1980, p. 126). Furthermore, Metz considers "common biblical thinking as memory," to be the core of Israel's heritage to Western culture (Metz 1999a, p. 92). This heritage belongs to the "European history of spirit" and therefore to the "history of the constitution of a reason which intends to be practical as subjective and solidary freedom" (Metz 1980, p. 59).

Despite belonging to reason, Metz wonders whether memory can be regarded in philosophy as a fundamental concept rather than only a regional or derived one. The response to this question, in Metz's view, depends on the extent to which philosophy is able to deal with the relation, present in the concept of memory, between reason and history. That is, to the extent to which the original question of truth is placed under the umbrella of practical critical reason or, on the contrary, follows the idealism of traditional historiography. Memory is in fact indispensable for a philosophy that wants to become practical and not merely theoretical. For Metz, "[t]he essential dynamics of history consists of the memory of suffering as a negative consciousness of future freedom and as a stimulus to overcome suffering within the framework of that freedom" (Metz 1999a, p. 53).

From a philosophical perspective, Metz analyzes the above mentioned connection between reason and history in both the tradition of the Platonic anamnesis and that of the critical use of reason in line with Kantian practical reason and the Marxist critique of ideology. From the first perspective, in Plato's *Meno*, anamnesis is the basis for rational knowledge, and therefore constitutive of reason itself. Rational knowledge is rooted in a previously known truth, remembered through the Socratic maieutic. Metz recalls how Plato's remembering of a priori knowledge originates in the Homeric poets inspired by the muses. That is, 'the basis of anamnesis is . . . attributed by Plato to divine inspiration" (Metz 1980, p. 187). The basic Platonic idea, that is, knowledge based on a previously known divine truth, persists not only in Neoplatonism but also in dissimilar traditions such as those of Thomas Aquinas's a priori light of reason, Descartes's innate idea of God, and Leibniz's defense of a priori knowledge against the Aristotelian concept of memory defended by sensualism.

Furthermore, the connection between reason and history is also present in both the hermeneutical and the critical–practical traditions that stem from the Hegelian system. The hermeneutical tradition was important particularly for the fight against historicism and the concomitant "destruction of the relationship between life and history" (Metz 1980, p. 189). From Metz's perspective, the distinction made by historicism between memory and history ends up depriving history of memory and tradition, and therefore privileging the dominant knowledge of science in history. For Wilhelm Dilthey, for example, the key differentiation between human and natural sciences concerns history. In fact, the purpose of the human sciences is to grasp human and historical life which requires an inner

articulation of the temporal structures our own experience and the interpretation of the external objectivations of others. From this perspective, memory is rooted in the concept of experience and therefore "unable to free it from the suspicion of historical psychologism" (Metz 1980, p. 191).

The other movement in which memory plays a relevant role and from which Metz received a crucial influence is what he describes as "a critical and practical philosophy of history and society" (Metz 1980, p. 192). This critique is not just theoretical, rather it deals with the problem of theory and praxis in practical reason, "that is, in its realization, always situated within certain social and historical relationships of foundation and reference" (ibid.). In this sense, history is and remains immanent in reason, which becomes practical in its liberating task of criticism. This practical task of liberating criticism, established initially by the Enlightenment, recognizes "that memory was not simply an object, but an inner aspect of all critical consciousness" (Metz 1980, p. 193). This critical use of memory as the constitutive problem of practical reason is found in some members of the Frankfurt School, particularly Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, and Theodor Adorno. Metz highlights the Jewish background of these thinkers, which allows them to seek a different source for truth, a different form of knowledge, and particularly to extract from the experience of persecution and suffering a different perspective on history.

In fact, in relation to memory, Metz recognizes Benjamin's memory of suffering in the world as a way of realizing reason and freedom against the banal and unreflected "idea of a non-dialectical progress of reason" (ibid.). This idea is developed by Benjamin in his thesis containing a new theory of knowledge in which the concept of reality is both facticity and possibility. Knowledge contains life in the frustrated past and as a consequence opens the possibility of the exigency of justice, because the victims of history remain alive thanks to memory. For Benjamin, memory is not an instrument for exploring the past, but the scenario in which the historian has to dig to rescue lost fragments of history that allow the present to be unravelled as a constellation of dangers. This is what comes to expression in the Benjaminian concept of "arrested dialectic" (*Dialektik im Stillstand*). This is to break the usual patterns of perception and interpretation of time that degrade people to mere elements of an objective process that is but the manifestation of the system of domination that subdues singularities. This masking that celebrates itself as evolution can only be contested by breaking the spell involved in the representation of progress, a representation that dominates both the philosophies of history and the historicist positivism.

In Herbert Marcuse, the critical aspect of memory is initially exposed in a psychoanalytic context in which the discovery of the capacity to remember "goes hand in hand with the restoration of the knowing content of the imagination and in this way, the *recherche du temps perdue* becomes a vehicle of liberation" (Metz 1980, p. 193). Then, in the context of the theory of history and society, the restoration of memory to its rightful place as a means of liberation becomes fundamental: it is "one of the noblest tasks of philosophy" (ibid.). Metz agrees with Marcuse in retaining Heidegger's fundamental insight "that something extraordinarily important had been forgotten in the modern world" (Jay 1982, p. 2). However, unlike Heidegger, Metz and Marcuse consider that the purpose of memory is not the restoration of the consciousness of Being, but the rise of dangerous messages from the past to the present. In fact, Marcuse is the one who uses the adjective "dangerous" in relation to memories, which is so important for Metz's *Faith and History and Society* and for later works. In fact, Marcuse says: "[r]emembrance of the past may give rise to dangerous insights, and the established society seems to be apprehensive of the subversive contents of memory" (Marcuse 1966, p. 98). In this way, both thinkers stress the emancipatory potential of memory, because the messages of the past brought by memory break the power of the given facts (the naturalization of history) in order to place the suffering of men as a critical impulse of present and future transformations.

Metz takes sides with the Frankfurt School in considering the memory of suffering as a central category of practical critical reason. He also endorses the idea inherited from the Enlightenment that the processes of emancipation are the noblest task of critical reason. In this sense, the memory of critical-anamnestic reason must be none other than the memory of freedom. However, Metz is at odds

with the Enlightenment's interpretation of the history of freedom as a history of progressive mastery over nature and, in this sense, as a dominative praxis that springs from the same history understood as totality. This way of understanding freedom ends up destroying memory, forgetting in the process the pain that produces the cry of the victims, and destroying also the feeling of guilt.

In Metz's view the evocation of freedom must emphasize the memory of suffering. This suffering becomes the history of freedom in a "dangerous tradition" that cannot be overcome or assumed by any interpretation or later review. It is the "dangerous tradition" that does not historicize itself but maintains the vigor of the cry of the victims. In this way, reason is sensitized by suffering to the point that freedom can only be expressed in reference to suffering and not as the a priori of reason. The a priori of reason is now the victim of history. This subversive memory opposes what Metz calls "false consciousness." This type of consciousness is an idealized and superficial mode of relation with the past, hiding danger and pain through harmless clichés. False consciousness means that any past seems better. It is also the glorious memory of war and its heroes, forgetting the dead in the process. For Metz, memory is dangerous precisely because it does not allow reconciliation with the past of pain,

> [t]hey [memories] illuminate for a few moments and with a harsh steady light the questionable nature of things we have apparently come to terms with, and show up the banality of our supposed 'realism'. They break through the canon of all that is taken as self-evident, and unmask as deception the certainty of those "whose hour is always there" (John 7.6). They seem to subvert our structures of plausibility. Such memories are like dangerous and incalculable visitants from the past (Metz 1980, pp. 109–10).

Metz shares with Kant an appreciation of practical reason's capacity to exceed the confines of speculative reason. This appreciation is also shared by Levinas in his concern for an ethics that is not founded on any ontology, however Metz and Levinas distance themselves from Kant's idea that freedom is primary and foundational. Metz and Levinas consider that the meaning of freedom depends on a more primordial responsibility for the other's suffering. For both thinkers the response to an appeal gives man the sense of freedom. As R. Clifton Spargo points out in relation to Levinas's ethics: "the victim is not just a scandal against knowledge. Rather, she denotes responsibility" (Spargo 2006, p. 11). For Metz, responsibility is a key category of political theology to the extent to which the memories of suffering bring "dangerous insights for the present" because they "make demands on us" (Metz 1980, p. 109). Furthermore, this praxis in favor of the suffering other is, in Levinas and Metz, essentially pathic, meaning the memory of suffering provokes a suffering in the subject who feels himself compelled to respond. For Metz, "[t]he Jewish-Christian *memoria passionis* articulates itself as a memory that makes one free to suffer from the sufferings of others, and to respect the prophetic witness of others' suffering" (Metz and Moltmann 1995, p. 11).

Metz and Levinas are interested in interrupting the progressive flow of knowledge that springs from traditional historiography by positing memory as a challenging category for history. Levinas's immemorial memory and Metz's dangerous memory operate as redemptive categories which prevent history from obtaining its meaning from victors and survivors while simultaneously neglecting the cry of the other who suffers. Furthermore, for both thinkers the concept of memory allows the relation between history and nature to be broken, thereby overcoming the naturalized reading of past events as something irretrievably done. In this way the past is not closed and it cannot be captured in representation. The meaning of the past rather, is produced by exteriority in which memory is attentive to the other's death. This exteriority appears greater than any historiographical or philosophical order of knowledge and compels subjectivity to react. In other words, the suffering and death of the other makes claims on subjectivity and has a normative importance for praxis. As Levinas and Metz identify, suffering is the authority to which all must respond: having an awareness of history and attempting to live out of this awareness means, above all, not evading history's disasters. It also means there is at least one authority that we should never reject or despise—the authority of those who suffer.

Turning to Metz's memory, it is worth noting how dangerous memory, coupled with the concepts of narrative and solidarity, can be. In this regard, Metz recognizes that memory is primarily a narration rather than an argumentation. This is because memory has to do with human experiences. For Metz, this is particularly true in the Bible, which is fundamentally a narration of the experiences of the people of Israel in their relation with God. Christianity also acts as a community, although not "primarily a community interpreting and arguing, but a community remembering and narrating with a practical intention—a narrative and evocative memory of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus" (Metz 1980, p. 212). But along with the Bible, history is also made of the experiences of non-identity through violence and segregation, injustice and inequality. If Levinas accentuates that the memory of the tragedies can only be revealed by those who suffer, Metz points to a memory narrated "by those who experience them" (Metz 1980, p. 123) which cannot be systematized in arguments. From Metz's perspective, "these stories break through the spell of a total reconstruction based on abstract reason" (Metz 1980, p. 214), to disrupt the present. The practical intention of memory and narrative is possible via solidarity with those who have been defeated and killed.

3.2. Auschwitz and the Theodicy Question

Metz shares Levinas's insight in relation to the failure of any attempt to explain suffering and the concomitant problem that suffering poses to the concept of God. Both thinkers reject theodicy as an attempt to make God innocent, which can lead to a trivialization of human pain. Metz affirms that history exists as "the brittle and devastating histories of human suffering narrated by those experiencing them," and therefore he realizes "how they cannot be systematized in argument" (Metz 1980, p. 123). This affirmation recalls Levinas's rejection of memory as an ontological attempt to bring the past into the present via interpretation and his rejection of theodicy as intellectualization of the experience of suffering. Metz's and Levinas's insights mean that traditional theodicy needs to be reconsidered. Yet, there is certainly an essential difference between Levinas and Metz. The latter is a theologian and from this perspective he is essentially thinking of the challenges that the phenomenon of suffering implies for theology and for the praxis of the Catholic Church. The former is a Jewish philosopher who is interested in translating the ethical message of the Bible to a broader audience, meaning translating Hebrew (the Bible) into Greek (philosophy). Suffering is therefore, from Levinas's perspective, an ethical challenge for human beings, having as a background the biblical categories framed in an anarchical responsibility.

Admittedly, Metz is convinced that theological categories are philosophically worthy of consideration, and therefore he is prone to dialogue with philosophy. Furthermore, he considers this dialogue a kind of testimony to the hope in the liberating power of redemption carried out by Jesus. It is worth noting that Metz's messianism is a weak messianism, meaning Metz emphasizes the suffering testimony of Jesus rather than his power or mystery as the son of God. Metz underlines the social responsibility of Jesus's followers rather than man's transcendental salvation or the place of miracles in Jesus's life. This is why for Metz memory is accomplished as *memoria passionis*, *mortis et resurrectionis Jesu Christi*. This memory is liberating to the extent to which it remembers the testament of Christ's love, in which the kingdom of God appeared among men by initially establishing that kingdom between men, by Jesus's confession of himself as the one who was on the side of the oppressed and rejected, and by his proclamation of the coming kingdom of God as the liberating power of unconditional love.

While Levinas talks about "theology without theodicy," Metz considers theodicy as the central problem of political theology. However, by looking more closely at Metz's and Levinas's considerations we realize that both thinkers follow the path of Kantian theodicy as a rejection of any attempt to explain suffering. In fact, Levinas's end of theodicy transforms into an ethical theodicy, and Metz's anti-theodicy becomes theodicy as a disturbing question to God rather than the defense of God for the suffering of the world. By being on the Kantian path, each thinker places himself against the Hegelian philosophy of history as a theodicy in which suffering is justified in the dialectic of the progress of Spirit. Furthermore, in speaking about suffering and death each thinker is looking at the Holocaust.

Auschwitz, as Metz declares, became crucial for his theologizing in 1973 when writing the first draft of the document Our Hope for the German bishop's conference. Metz confesses with regret that too slowly he realized how this concrete situation of suffering challenges the way in which theology had been done. From this year onward, his memory of the Second World War becomes meaningful and the theodicy question arises with greater force. Theology is from now on a theology "after Auschwitz," and therefore theology cannot remain "untouched after such a catastrophe" (Metz 1994, p. 611).

For Metz "the theodicy question, the basic theological question . . . is not 'who saves me?' but rather 'who saves you?'", and immediately he adds "I begin not with the question, 'What happens to me when I suffer, when I die,' but rather with, 'what happens to me when you suffer, when you die'" (Downey and Metz 1999, p. 137). Therefore, the theodicy question becomes a cry for those who suffer unjustly, for the victims and defeated in history. For Metz, the discourse about God is about the salvation of those who suffer in history. This means that suffering cannot be idealistically explained; in Metz's terms, "[t]o confront Auschwitz is in no way to comprehend it. Anyone wishing to comprehend in this area will have comprehended nothing" (Downey and Metz 1999, p. 41). This is why Metz says: "I consider as blasphemy every Christian theodicy (i.e., every attempt at a so-called justification of God) and all language about meaning when these are initiated outside this catastrophe or on some level above it" (ibid.). Metz's statement recalls Fackhenheim's words: "I won't even consider finding a purpose in Auschwitz because the very attempt to find it is blasphemous" (Fackhenheim 1989, p. 85). These words belong to a lecture Fackhenheim delivered at the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 1968 during a symposium on "The Future of Hope." On this occasion, the Canadian philosopher reflected on the challenges Auschwitz posed to Jews and to humanity. For him, this challenge is as unique as this event: Auschwitz cannot be explained and cannot be forgotten. The response to the despair and evil felt by the Jewish community is the commandant of hope: "testify against evil by our very existence." For Fackhenheim, to exist as a Jew is to be committed to hope that a second Auschwitz will not happen.

From the perspective of the "theodicy question," Metz criticizes how theology disposed of the disturbing problem of justice for those who suffer unjustly, transforming it directly into a problem about the redemption of the guilty. For Metz, there was a shift from the biblical concern with human suffering to a concern for individual sins. In this shift, according to Metz, Augustine played an important role.

3.3. The Standstill of the Theodicy Question

In Metz, a theology sensitive to theodicy means that theology needs to look at the concrete reality of human suffering in order to be practical. In this purpose, theology has to overcome classical theodicy, which seeks to defend God for the suffering in the world. In spite of the term "theodicy" being coined by Leibniz in the seventeenth century, the problem posed by evil in relation to the goodness and power of God can be traced back earlier, particularly in the writings of Augustine. While for Levinas evil is the excess of being, for Augustine it is lack or deficiency of being. This is the path Augustine takes in order to respond to the problem posed by dualistic Manichaeism in relation to the double principle operative in the world—good and evil—and also to Marcion's dualism of the wrathful Hebrew God and the redeemer God of the New Testament. For Manichean dualism, evil and sin are not the result of free will, but the result of a universal and eternal principle of evil which fights with the principle of goodness in the human soul. As William E. Mann argues, "Manichaeism thus offered a straightforward solution for the problem of evil: God is doing the best he can against evil, but finds himself facing an independent opponent as formidable as he" (Mann 2006, p. 40).

As stated above, Augustine responds to these dualisms by following the Plotinian solution and considering evil as a privation and not as a substance. For Augustine the primary problem is not the origin of evil, as the Manichean wrongly believes, but the nature of evil. In questioning this nature, Augustine concludes that evil is the lack of goodness (*privatio boni*) and therefore, from a metaphysical perspective, evil does not exist as an entity, but rather what exist are lower and higher grades of being in relation to God, the Supreme Being. Moral evil springs from a deficiency in the election of human

will which can choose lower beings instead of higher ones. That is, free will is a good which can be used wrongly by humans and, therefore, evil in Augustine's consideration has a defective cause and not an efficient cause. In the *Libero Arbitrio*, according to Metz, Augustine attributes responsibility for the evil and suffering in the world only to humanity and its history of guilt which stems from the rejection of God.

What bothers Metz most in relation with Augustine's perspective is the appeasement of the questioning directed to God, questioning that demands an explanation in view of the history of suffering in the world. In other words, Augustine's emphasis in relation to sin and guilt attenuates primordial attention to the suffering of man. According to Metz, by emphasizing salvation as the redemption of sin and blame, Augustine forgets the eschatological promise of universal justice, which also includes past suffering. From Metz's perspective, the biblical view of salvation, the promise of salvation in God's name, refers not only to salvation from sin and guilt, but to the liberation of human beings from the inscrutable situations of human suffering. In this way in classical theodicies, in line with Augustine, the victims of history are forgotten and the possibility to respond to the cry of justice that arises from their suffering is missed.

While in classical theodicies human suffering is forgotten by emphasizing sin and guilt in the history of redemption, in modern theories of emancipation, concrete human suffering is hidden in a transcendental or universal subject of history. In these theories, like Marxism for example, suffering is integrated into a universal perspective, which for Hegel is termed "world spirit," and for Schelling "nature." Furthermore, by making God the unique subject of history, the classic theodicies end up expelling God from history in the modern, secularized theories of emancipation. From Marx's perspective, for example, the deus salvator is replaced by the homo emancipator. As Thompson expresses it, "if God is the one in charge, and yet is evidently doing so little to make the human world better, then it is time to put human beings in charge in God's place" (Thompson 2004, p. 112). However, both perspectives share the same failure: "[i]n Metz's analysis, both classical theories of redemption and modern theories of emancipation have tried to shield themselves from responsibility towards those who suffer in history" (Thompson 2004, p. 112). From both perspectives the question of freedom remains tied to the question: "who is to blame" for this suffering? Consequently, "who is to bear the responsibility?" Both perspectives fall into a mechanism of exoneration from responsibility. In fact, while the classical theodicies blame human beings for evil in order to preserve the omnipotent and loving God, the theories of emancipation understand suffering as part of a whole project of liberation in which progress towards a final liberation is the driving force of history. Furthermore, the theories of emancipation exonerate themselves for history's failures by blaming others, the enemy, for oppression and totalitarian repression.

From Metz's perspective, on the contrary, by assuming responsibility for history's failures for the suffering of other human beings, the subject becomes a "true homo emancipator" (Thompson 2004, p. 114). This responsibility is a praxis of solidarity in which the memory of past suffering becomes the cornerstone of such responsibility. The biblical perspective offers, according to Metz, a perspective of redemption in which the eschatological promises of justice for the living and dead can be considered. The solidarity based on the memory of suffering "is a practical solidarity of memory which looks from the standpoint of the conquered and the victims sacrificed in the world theatre of history" (Metz 1980, p. 130).

3.4. Theodicy as the Questioning of God

The central problem of theology is "the cry for the salvation of others, of those who suffer unjustly, of the victims and the vanquished in our history" (Metz 1988, p. 55). The discourse about God is first and foremost a question about this salvation and the truth that guides this discourse is a resistance against every form of injustice that creates suffering. In Metz's claim for resistance against injustice and the hope for a better world, the influence of Bloch is evident. However, Benjamin provides Metz with a vision of the past that moderates Bloch's future-oriented perspective of hope. From this perspective,

the theodicy question is eschatological in the way in which it is a hope of universal salvation, including for those who have died. Theology does not develop its answers by reconciling everything, but rather directs its questioning incessantly back toward God. As in Bloch's anti-theodicy, Metz's theodicy question can "never be answered conclusively", and the main task of theology is to seek "a new language that prevents [the question] to be forgotten" (Metz 2006, p. 113).

Furthermore, Metz not only criticizes traditional theodicies, but also the theologies and philosophies that posit suffering in God, particularly the theologies of Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jürgen Moltmann, and Urs Von Balthasar. Levinas himself expresses it in this way: "[i]n our suffering God suffers with us . . . It is God who suffers most in human suffering" (Levinas 1999, p. 182). In Metz's opinion, by positing a suffering God, or God participating in our sufferings, these theologies minimize the negativity of suffering. The idea of a suffering God is just speculative and risks ignoring the human history of suffering. Furthermore, it seems also a duplication of human suffering and a projection of the discourse of solidarity in human society. Metz also wonders how the concept of a suffering God can avoid an eternalization of suffering and can present a real fight against the causes of suffering and the hope for liberation. The perspective of a suffering God finally falls within the Hegelian self-movement of the Spirit and therefore it loses its force, domesticated by its conceptualization.

Against the above framing, Metz proposes *Leiden an Gott*. The translation of this expression into English poses some problems as James Matthew Ashley, Metz's translator, underlines

> [i]n German *Leiden an* translates to suffering from, as in "suffering from a cold." What cannot be rendered into English is Metz's correlation of *Leiden an Gott* with *Rückfragen an Gott* [to re-inquire or ask again of God]. In the light of this wordplay, I have chosen "suffering unto God" in order to express (a) that this is a form of relationship to God and (b) that it is an active, dynamic state and not just a passive enduring (Metz 1994, p. 115).

Suffering unto God is the disturbing question which addresses God with the meaningless suffering of others. It is understood from Israel's poverty of spirit, which means Israel's inability to be consoled by strategies of evasion, by ahistorical myths, in the face of suffering "which cover[s] over the fragmented, endangered character of human being" (Ashley 1998, p. 160).

To Metz the most appropriate linguistic form for this type of experience of God and speaking about God is the language of prayer. This language of prayer is itself "a language of suffering, a language of crisis, a language of doubt and of radical danger, a language of complaint and accusation, a language of crying out" (Metz 1994, pp. 620–1). This is a language more dramatic and rebellious, more radical and disturbing, less harmonious and less likely to conform than academic or discursive language. It is the language of the complaint, protest, and cry. The language of prayer has a long biblical tradition (from Job to Jesus) and even more, a long tradition throughout the history of mankind "as the most impressive and moving document of human language of suffering" (ibid.). The language of prayer consists of passionate questions addressed to God, demanding explanation. Therefore, the language of suffering unto god is not primarily one of consoling answers to experiences of suffering; rather, it is much more a language of passionate re-questioning that arises out of suffering, a re-questioning of God, full of highly charged expectation.

This suffering unto God is experienced against a mystical backdrop which Metz terms "mysticism of open eyes" (Metz 2006, p. 105). That is, a mysticism in which there is a "growing perception of others' suffering," and therefore compassion and responsibility. From Metz's perspective, Christianity is a religion of crisis and combative hope rather than one of a friendly God. As Martinez says, it is a religion "that disquiets, interrupts, contradicts, endangers, and forces one to have hope against all hope in an unending praxis of universal justice, solidarity and peace that is always suspended by the catastrophes of history" (Martinez 2001, p. 86). From the perspective of the "mystic of open eyes," the structure of the "I" is transformed into compassion, which means the disposition to be interrupted by the suffering of others and parallelly to recognize the authority of those who suffer. From Metz's perspective, compassion is the specific legacy of the Bible for Europe.

Metz's mysticism of open eyes leads primarily towards an encounter with faces. In fact, Metz clarifies that Christian hope cannot be spoken about in a general way, but must remain grounded in the concrete historical–social situation in which subjects find themselves: their experiences, suffering, struggles, and obstacles. Levinas also points out that responsibility stems from the encounter with the other who "has the face of the poor, the stranger, the widow, and the orphan" (Levinas 1969, p. 251). However, Levinas insists that the concept of face goes beyond material contours and even "the best way of encountering the other is not even to notice the colour of his eyes!" (Levinas 1985, p. 85). Metz coincides with Levinas about the significance of the face as a hermeneutical tool to approach others' suffering and therefore responsibility.

However, for Metz, the material reality of face has something to say: it reflects struggles, suffering, and hope. In fact, when visiting Latin America in 1988, Metz had the opportunity to find concrete faces of suffering. He discovered the faces of men, women, and children reflecting poverty and sorrow, and particularly found the face of the *indios*: "short faces, black faces . . . and in their eyes, dreams, desires, or even tears were seen" (Metz 1997, p. 129). However, not only was suffering and sadness reflected in these faces, resistance was also found. That is, resistance against the accelerating time of modernity, and against the mechanism of evasion, as well as strategies for the immunization of post-modern mentalities in relation to universal responsibility. In fact, according to Metz, by thinking on a small scale, in varied fragments, postmodernity ends up in a privatization of life and therefore in an attitude of a spectator before the situations of crises and suffering in the world.

In spite of being only a partial vision of Latin American society, Metz's encounter with concrete faces gave him the opportunity to materialize his conviction that the logos of theology must be interrupted by the face of the other. Furthermore, in the encounter with the face of the other, Metz and Levinas discover a face which summons the subject as an authority and a victim at the same time; that is, this encounter discloses an asymmetrical relationship in which the one summoned to respond feels him/herself compelled to respond.

3.5. The Asymmetrical Relationship

In *Memoria Passionis*, Metz speaks in similar words to Levinas in relation to interhuman relationships: the relationship with the other must be non-symmetrical. For Metz, the symmetrical relationships of recognition, typical of modern advanced societies, do not go beyond the logic of market relations, trade, and competition. Only the non-symmetric relations, that is, the concern for the others excluded and forgotten, break the power of this logic. For both Levinas and Metz, the suffering other interrupts the time in which the subject feels comfortable by requesting a response. This is also why Metz and Levinas criticize the Buberian I-Thou relationship. For Metz, this relationship is too private to reach social meaning, for Levinas it is too symmetrical. For Metz, it is apolitical, for Levinas it is ethically insufficient. Both Metz and Levinas are thinking how to do justice to the victims so far irremediably laid aside by history.

In this asymmetry, Levinas emphasizes the interhuman relationship as a concern for the other without reciprocity. In this sense, Levinas manifests: "I am responsible for the Other without waiting for reciprocity, were I to die for it. Reciprocity is his affair" (Levinas 1985, p. 98). This is so because the responsibility for the other, which is the fundamental ethical obligation, is not imposed as an imperative of an existing consciousness, but is prior to self and its principle of individuation. In being ethical, this asymmetry derives from a fundamental inequality between the subject and the other. For Levinas, in the ethical horizon, the other always takes precedence. This means that before meeting the other and grasping its qualities, the subject is called upon to respond to the other's fate, even to the other's own responsibility. That is, the interhuman is primarily an ethical face-to-face relationship and derivatively political. In the political order the fundamental non-symmetry is an excess because the political is the order of the citizens, of the equals. Therefore, Levinas does not reject the equality of human beings, but this equality is derived and non-original. In the ethical order,

the interhuman lies also in the recourse that people have to one another for help, before the marvelous alterity of the Other has been banalized or dimmed in a simple exchange of courtesies which become established as an 'interpersonal commerce' of customs (Levinas 1998a, p. 165).

However, unlike Levinas's derived equality, Metz is thinking of the fundamental equality among human beings. Under this equality, paradoxically, the victims emerge as authorities to the extent to which their suffering concerns us. Put in other words, for Metz, the authority of the suffering other emerges because human beings are essentially equal and therefore the victims are not in unequal conditions in relation to the traditional protagonists of history. On the contrary, the victims claim a privileged consideration due to their vulnerable condition. This authority of those who suffer compels a political response which Metz terms compassion. In Levinas's and Metz's consideration, a gap is produced between the Other who suffers and those who respond. While Levinas's ethical relation of face-to-face encounters brings to light an essential difference of the self and the Other, Metz is primarily contemplating a subject among other subjects as part of a community. In fact,

the word subject does not refer to the isolated individual, the monad who only afterwards made sure of his coexistence with other subjects. Experiences of solidarity with, antagonism towards, liberation from, and anxiety about other subjects form an essential part of the constitution of the religious subject (Metz 1980, p. 61).

This difference between Levinas's prioritization of ethics and Metz's prioritization of politics leads Thompson to affirm that their responses were shaped "by different commitments: Levinas stressed the duty to respond to the other who is always other, whereas Metz focused more on the human community that he sees as the ultimate goal of such an encounter". Therefore, "for Levinas, unlike for Metz, this authority also produces a kind of unbridgeable difference between the other who suffers and those who are duty-bound to respond" (Thompson 2004, p. 154). In spite of Thompson catching the essential difference between each thinker, her conclusion about Levinas's "unbridgeable difference" lacks full consideration of the political equality of human beings, as emphasized above. Levinas's interest is ethical because ethics is for him primordial, but political equality is a reality that Levinas does not ignore, even if he does not develop a political theory or political consequences for his ethical approach.

Turning to Metz's response to suffering, it should be noted that for the German theologian *compassio* is not a religious romanticism but a practical response in which hatred and violence have been removed. This authority signifies that the response to those who suffer is fundamental as a source of meaning for ethics. In fact, the obedience to this authority tests the righteousness of any ethics that do not want to become "ethics of accommodation" or justification, meaning an ethics "that seeks to reconcile human actions with the ever changing practical circumstances" (Metz 1999b, p. 232). Furthermore, this authority obliges all human beings prior to any agreement and therefore cannot be sidestepped by any culture or religion, for example, in terms of cultural and religious understanding. The authority of those who suffer is weak because it stems from the margins, but is at the same time strong because it cannot be evaded by ethics, politics, culture or religion. Beyond the above-mentioned difference in relation to the priority of ethics or politics, both Metz and Levinas have the same interest: the non-identity of the experience of a victim's suffering. They see the suffering other as an authority, both a weak and strong authority because it is vulnerable and also makes demands. From this perspective, the unjustifiable suffering of the other opens up the ethical and political perspectives of the interhuman.

Moreover, Metz is in accord with Levinas in considering that the primordial relationship between meaningless suffering and death calls into question "our sealed-up identities" (Schuster and Bochert-Kimmig 1999, pp. 33–34). For Metz, the identity of the subject is always threatened and at the same time opened to full disclosure depending on the position adopted in relation to the other's death and suffering. Although the subject can adopt a mechanism of evasion in relation to responsibility, for

Metz, subjectivity is essentially tied to the suppressed or repressed other. From Metz's perspective, as well as from Levinas's, it is the death of the other which "radically destabilizes our attempts to find and create meaning in our present" (Ashley 1998, p. 157). In this way, both Levinas and Metz are at odds with the Heideggerian claim that the anticipation of death is a call of the authentic self whose own death offers the authentic meaning of death. On the contrary, because death is the call of the other's suffering it affects subjectivity and becomes the authority to which we have to respond.

Regarding the relation between suffering and reason, Candace Mac Lean affirms that the former "has the power to direct practical reason, as freedom" (McLean 2012, pp. 62–63). In fact, the autonomy of reason is dialectically anchored here in an act of recognition, the recognition of the authority of those who suffer undeserved and unjustly. In Metz's view, this recognition protects reason from any instrumentalization or functionalization, and justifies a non-ideological claim of universality because it is able to generate consent in circumstances which are strictly pluralist. Furthermore, in the dialectical nature of Metz's perspective, the inappropriateness of both the previous hermeneutic explanation and the subsequent discursive strengthening of the authority of those who suffer, is highlighted. If the explanation and discourse were the case, obedience would lead to intellection. On the contrary, the first thing is not to discuss suffering, but to respond to it. In this regard, the encounter with the suffering of others is a "state of exception" that interrupts normal life guided by forgetfulness.

4. Conclusions

This paper has moved from the concept of memory to that of responsibility, articulated by a critique of any attempt to explain suffering from religious or historical perspectives. In this way, the inadequacy and insufficiency of any theoretical attempt to justify or explain suffering has emerged, and therefore an ethical commitment in relation to the victims has also arisen. This commitment is shaped by a response to the cry of the victims which summons the subject to understand freedom as limited and subordinated to ethical responsibility. This commitment stems both from Levinas's historical experience of persecution and from Levinas's biblical commitment from which he has learned that the responsibility for a fellow human is a reasonable way to think and live.

Levinas's declaration of the end of theodicy shows that beyond the subject of intentional acts (Husserl) or that of comprehension (Heidegger), a subject in anticipation exposed to the interpellation of the other is awake. Traditional theodicy is a scandalous attempt to ignore the cry of the victims of history via a theoretical explanation of evil and human suffering. This theoretical perspective is based on an idealism in which freedom is the quintessence of the constitution of the subject. On the contrary, in the responsible subject, in messianic subjectivity, freedom is limited by the cries of the victims, and the subject is therefore "subjected to the other." Furthermore, the other of the asymmetrical relation is a victim and therefore comes from above and appears as ethically superior to the subject due to his or her suffering. It is the asymmetry of the relation with the victim that obligates the subject.

In Levinas's estimation, memory is the memory of the immemorial, that is, of the trace of the infinity that is present in the face of the victims. Since the victims are ethically beyond the subject's powers this memory is brought by the victims themselves. The victims whose epiphany is the trace of God invokes ethical commitment. Metz for his part proclaims that the impassivity of the logos has to be substituted by the compassion of memory. The role that memory plays in Metz's thinking is central in his attempt to do justice to the victims. What Metz argues is that memory is not thinking, nor a work of collecting information, but rather a voice crying out. In relation to memory both Metz and Levinas attempt to get rid of a memory understood as anamnesis, that is, as an act of comprehension, an act of recollection.

Levinas and Metz's perspectives of memory distance themselves from public memories in which the cultural industry and the politics of memory converge. The proliferation of memorials, the multiplication of commemorative monuments, the media transformation of traumatic occurrences into banal events and their sensationalist exploitation, rather than a culture of memory, seem to expunge from memory and facilitate oblivion.

Levinas is emphatic in proclaiming the end of theodicy; Metz for his part considers the theodicy question the core of his political theology. However, Metz's theodicy is unorthodox from the catholic perspective. It is rather an anti-theodicy as long as he considers "blasphemy" to be an attempt to justify God in relation to human suffering. Both Levinas's and Metz's rejection of traditional theodicy stems from the experience of Auschwitz as the paradigm of gratuitous suffering. For Levinas, the response to Auschwitz is an ethical responsibility able to become hostage of the other's suffering, which for Metz is a political resistance transformed into compassion.

In this line of thinking, the logos of theology and philosophy must be interrupted by the face of the other who speaks from his/her historical experiences of destitution and neglect. In a strikingly similar way Levinas and Metz want to show that everything "about truth," is in its origin an answer to the problem posed by the unjust pain of the victim. Indeed, this makes it clear that memory is a voice crying out, rather than a recollection of information about the past. Metz states that the impassivity of the logos has to be substituted by the compassion of memory. For him, remembering and telling (memory and narrative) are Jewish legacies that can be obscured by an ahistorical dualism stemming from the Hellenistic legacy.

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