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Beyond Good and Evil: Understanding the Role of Suffering in Human Existence

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Abstract. The persistent reality of evil and suffering constitutes one of the most enduring philosophical and theological challenges to human understanding, particularly within the context of belief in an all-good and omnipotent God. Throughout intellectual history, suffering has provoked existential anxiety, skepticism toward divine providence, and diverse explanatory frameworks ranging from metaphysical dualism to moral responsibility grounded in human freedom. This study is situated within this long-standing discourse and responds to contemporary confusion arising from attempts to reconcile human suffering with the goodness of God and the meaning of human existence. The purpose of this research is to critically examine the role of suffering in human existence by analyzing philosophical and theological interpretations of evil, with particular emphasis on Christian thought. The study seeks to clarify whether suffering is merely an absurd disruption of human life or an integral dimension of existence that possesses moral and spiritual significance. The research findings indicate that suffering is neither accidental nor meaningless within the framework of human existence. Rather, evil and suffering are shown to be ontologically dependent on the good and largely rooted in human finitude, freedom, and moral failure. The study demonstrates that God does not directly cause evil but permits it to achieve greater goods, including moral growth, spiritual maturity, and authentic freedom. Human attempts to deny or evade suffering are revealed to deepen existential disorientation rather than resolve it. This research contributes to philosophical and theological scholarship by offering a coherent synthesis of classical and contemporary perspectives on evil and suffering. It advances the argument that, when rightly understood, suffering plays a formative role in human development and faith, thereby challenging reductive interpretations that portray it solely as punishment or divine absence.

Keywords: Theodicy, Free Will, Moral Responsibility, Divine Providence, Christian Theology, Metaphysics of Pain

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По ту сторону добра и зла: понимание роли страданий в человеческом существовании

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Аннотация. Непреходящая реальность зла и страданий представляет собой один из наиболее устойчивых философских и теологических вызовов человеческому пониманию, особенно в контексте веры во всеблагое и всемогущего Бога. На протяжении всей интеллектуальной истории страдание вызывало экзистенциальную тревогу, скептицизм по отношению к божественному провидению и разнообразные объяснительные рамки, от метафизического дуализма до моральной ответственности, основанной на человеческой свободе. Исследование вписывается в этот давний дискурс и отвечает на современную путаницу, возникающую в результате попыток примирить человеческие страдания с благостью Бога и смыслом человеческого существования. Цель работы — критически изучить роль страданий в человеческом существовании путем анализа философских и теологических интерпретаций зла, с особым акцентом на христианскую мысль. Исследование направлено на выяснение того, является ли страдание всего лишь абсурдным нарушением человеческой жизни или неотъемлемой частью существования, обладающей моральным и духовным значением. Результаты исследования показывают, что страдание не является ни случайным, ни бессмысленным в рамках человеческого существования. Скорее, зло и страдание онтологически зависят от добра и в значительной степени коренятся в человеческой конечности, свободе и моральной несостоятельности. Исследование демонстрирует, что Бог не является непосредственной причиной зла, но допускает его для реализации более высоких благ, включая моральный рост, духовную зрелость и подлинную свободу. Попытки человека отрицать или избегать страдания, как выяснилось, углубляют экзистенциальную дезориентацию, а не разрешают ее. Эта работа вносит вклад в философскую и теологическую науку, предлагая последовательный синтез классических и современных взглядов на зло и страдание. Исследование выдвигает аргумент о том, что страдание, при правильном понимании, играет формирующую роль в развитии человека и вере, тем самым бросая вызов редукционистским интерпретациям, которые изображают страдание исключительно как наказание или божественное отсутствие.

Ключевые слова: теодицея, свобода воли, моральная ответственность, божественное провидение, христианская теология, метафизика боли

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Introduction

The human mind has sometimes strayed from the truth that a benevolent God governs the universe, and the supernatural revelation asserts that despite the existence of evil and suffering, the good God has prevailed over them, rendering them a transient reality. It focuses on locating the origin of evil and suffering and its relation to God's presence. The New Testament is used to examine how Jesus, the paradigm of Christians in the face of suffering, understands and lives with the problem of suffering and evil. Paul reiterates the vocation to authentic living amid suffering in these verses. Theological contemplation should provide Christians with a spirituality that effectively nurtures and fortifies their faith. Chapter Three's central theme is confronting pain directly with purpose and significance as a pathway to God. Christ emphasizes the need to bear the cross as an aspect of discipleship, redefining its significance to include suffering as an essential element on the path to renewal. The human tendency to flee from suffering, loneliness, and ignorance has led to discussions of evil as a threat to the world. Philosophers, psychologists, and theologians have sought to define the concept of evil, often drawing upon biblical interpretations. St. Thomas Aquinas posited that evil lacks substantial existence and is instead the absence of a specific good intrinsic to a being [1].

Aquinas believed that everything naturally is endowed with good, and any decline or depletion of this essence would be termed evil. Aquinas believed that while goodness is definite, evil is the degree to which a given thing falls short of perfection. Journet and Baisley define evil as a privation in reality, which can be perceived as the lack or absence of good in general or as the absence of some good present in a thing [2]. Evil represents a non-living, inanimate aspect of the soul that opposes virtue and prompts a careless abandonment of good by a rational agent. Baisley restricts the concept of evil to human beings and associates it with human shortcomings [3]. Teilhard de Chardin perceives evil as an inherent disorder and failure within nature, yet considers it essential for the cosmos's evolution through the ongoing interaction of natural laws [4]. St. Augustine views evil as a perversion of the will turned aside from God, narrowing it down to the human person's fault [5]. Augustine revealed that evil as a privation implies that a particular being lacks a good it requires to enjoy the integrity of its nature and only exists about the subject it affects and negates its perfection [6]. In this view, evil is neither total nor absolute, and its existence is relative. Newlands revealed that privation is the absence of some

perfection in the essential nature of a thing in question and represents the lack of good [7].

The novelty of this research lies not in the introduction of an entirely new concept of evil or suffering, but in the systematic integration, clarification, and reconfiguration of existing philosophical and theological traditions into a unified explanatory framework. While the problem of evil and suffering has been widely discussed in philosophy, theology, psychology, and sociology, existing studies typically address it within isolated disciplinary boundaries or through narrowly defined theodicies. This research departs from those approaches by offering a comprehensive synthesis that treats suffering simultaneously as a metaphysical condition, a moral consequence of freedom, and a spiritually formative reality. Unlike many studies that either defend a single theodical position (Augustinian, Irenaean, Thomistic, or evolutionary) or attempt to refute belief in God based on suffering, this research demonstrates that these perspectives are not mutually exclusive but structurally complementary. The study's originality lies in showing that suffering can be coherently understood only when evil is consistently interpreted as privation, human freedom is taken seriously, and divine goodness is neither absolutized into determinism nor diminished into moral indifference. This integrated position is rarely articulated as a single, sustained argument in existing scholarship. Furthermore, the research is novel in its explicit rejection of two dominant but opposing tendencies: the romanticization of suffering within certain religious interpretations, and the reduction of suffering to absurdity or randomness in secular critiques. By maintaining that suffering has no intrinsic redemptive value yet can acquire meaning through moral response and grace, the study advances a balanced position that avoids both extremes. In this sense, the research establishes a conceptual foundation rather than a polemical solution, positioning suffering as a constitutive dimension of human existence rather than an anomaly requiring speculative justification.

The primary purpose of this research is to clarify the nature, origin, and significance of suffering within human existence by examining its relationship to evil, freedom, and divine providence. The study seeks to move beyond emotionally driven, speculative, or doctrinally rigid responses to suffering by offering a philosophically coherent and theologically responsible framework for understanding why suffering persists in a world governed by a good God. Specifically, the research aims to: Examine the conceptual meaning of evil as privation rather than substance; Investigate the role of human freedom in the emergence of moral evil; Evaluate competing explanations of suffering across philosophical and theological traditions; and Clarify the Christian understanding of suffering without glorifying or trivializing it. By doing so, the research seeks to contribute to both academic discourse and practical reflection, offering intellectual clarity for scholars while also providing conceptual resources for individuals and communities grappling with suffering.

The argument of this research unfolds progressively and cumulatively, moving from conceptual foundations to existential and theological implications. First, the study establishes that evil does not possess independent or substantial existence, but is best understood as a privation or absence of due good. This metaphysical clarification is essential, as it prevents the mistaken conclusion that evil competes with divine goodness or originates from God as a positive cause. Second, the research argues that human freedom is central to the reality of moral evil. Because human beings are rational and volitional agents, they are capable of acting against reason and moral order. Moral evil, therefore, arises not from divine intention but from the misuse of freedom, making suffering an unavoidable consequence of moral responsibility within a non-deterministic universe. Third, the study examines natural and physical suffering as conditions rooted in finitude, historical development, and the structure of created reality. Rather than viewing such suffering as meaningless or divinely punitive, the research argues that it is a contingent feature of a world ordered toward growth, relationality, and moral formation. Fourth, the research engages Christian theology, particularly the New Testament, to argue that suffering is neither eliminated nor explained away by faith, but reinterpreted through the life, passion, and death of Christ. The Christian response does not deny suffering but situates it within hope, solidarity, and transformation. Finally, the study concludes that suffering, while real and often devastating, is not ultimate. It is temporary, relational, and subordinate to the good. Meaning is not found in suffering itself, but in the human response to it — through responsibility, compassion, and openness to grace.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, theoretical, and interdisciplinary research design. It is not an empirical investigation involving fieldwork or statistical measurement; rather, it is a conceptual and analytical inquiry into the problem of evil and suffering within human existence. The research is grounded primarily in philosophical reasoning and theological reflection, drawing on classical and contemporary sources in philosophy of religion, moral philosophy, Christian theology, psychology, and related human sciences. This design is appropriate because the subject matter — evil, suffering, moral responsibility, and divine providence — concerns metaphysical, moral, and existential questions that cannot be adequately examined through experimental or quantitative methods. Instead, they require critical interpretation, logical analysis, and comparative evaluation of ideas and arguments. The study relies exclusively on secondary sources for its analysis. These include: Classical philosophical texts (e.g., Augustine, Aquinas); Contemporary philosophical and theological works on evil, suffering, and theodicy; Biblical texts, particularly New Testament passages relevant to suffering and discipleship; and Scholarly monographs and peer-reviewed journal articles in philosophy, theology, and psychology. All sources were selected based on their academic credibility, relevance to the research problem, and influence within their

respective disciplines. The research employs critical textual analysis and comparative interpretation as its primary analytical methods. Key concepts such as evil, suffering, privation, moral evil, freedom, and divine permission are examined to clarify their meanings, internal coherence, and philosophical implications. This helps to avoid conceptual ambiguity and conflation of distinct categories (for example, moral evil versus physical evil). Different explanatory frameworks — Augustinian, Thomistic, Irenaean, evolutionary, psychological, and secular — are compared to identify their strengths, limitations, and underlying assumptions. This comparative approach enables the study to highlight points of convergence and divergence among major traditions. Scriptural texts and Christian doctrinal sources are interpreted within their theological context to assess how suffering is understood in relation to faith, redemption, and moral transformation. This interpretive approach respects both historical theology and contemporary theological reflection. An interdisciplinary framework is adopted to ensure a holistic understanding of suffering as both a human and theological reality. Philosophy provides the metaphysical and moral foundations; theology offers doctrinal and spiritual interpretation; psychology contributes insight into human experience and coping mechanisms; and sociology contextualizes suffering within historical and communal realities. The integration of these disciplines allows the study to address suffering without reducing it to a single explanatory model. As a theoretical study based solely on published texts, this research does not involve human participants and therefore does not require formal ethical approval. Nevertheless, ethical responsibility is maintained through accurate representation of sources, proper citation, and avoidance of speculative claims that exceed the limits of the evidence. The study is limited to philosophical and Christian theological perspectives on evil and suffering. It does not claim to provide an exhaustive account of all religious or cultural interpretations. Additionally, because the research is non-empirical, its conclusions are interpretive rather than predictive, aiming to offer conceptual clarity and theological insight rather than measurable outcomes.

Origin of Evil and God's Relation to Evil

The origin of evil remains a puzzle to many, as it is often associated with human free will and disregard for divine law [8]. Physical evil is due to the finitude of created things, while suffering results from their occurrences. Suarez argues that actions are good or evil only when they are ordered or prohibited by God [9]. Suarez believes that man's breach of God's natural laws, which are imprinted in man by nature, is the cause of evil. The Gnostics attribute the work of creation to a demiurge, not God, and claim that there were two intermediary Aeons (worlds) between God and the demiurge [10]. Aeons are divine beings that bridge individual divine aspects and the True God, also known as syzygies and Sonships in various Gnostic philosophies. One of these Aeons transgressed, resulting in the inception of evil. This philosophical explanation posits that the origin of evil lies outside humanity; however, Suarez attributes it to humanity's intentional disobedience of

natural law. The Manicheans similarly assert that matter exists and propose two eternal principles: good and evil [11]. They exist in a state of perpetual conflict, with the principle of evil accountable for disorder and chaos within the universe. The Gnostics and Manicheans were influenced by Platonic dualism, which regarded the material world as fundamentally evil [12]. Flume asserts that humanity is the source of evil, as it perpetrates injustice and harbors malice, sedition, strikes, wars, fraud, torture, calumny, and violence. These actions reflect the corrupted state of man's mind and heart.

St. Augustine asserts that natural evil arises from non-human entities that possess freedom and rationality. The text suggests that the devil and his spiritual associates represent the sole non-human rational free beings that have experienced a fall from grace. The Catechism of the Catholic Church asserts that human beings exhibit limitations and errors that distort the divine image within them, leading to human shortcomings that give rise to immoral actions [13]. Psychologically, all human problems stem from man's efforts to transform the universe into a man-made reality, aiming for a perfection that can only be realized in the world beyond this one. Nelson argues that man constantly confuses the values of this world and the world beyond, leading to disorder in their actions [14]. Three positions can be articulated regarding the origin of evil: the first posits that it arises from the defective material of creation; the second asserts that it originates in humanity's perverted tendencies; and the third contends that God is the cause of evil. The relationship between God, the author of the Universe, who is infinitely good and all-knowing, and the problem of evil warrants examination. The inquiry concerns whether God wills or allows the existence of evil in the world, and, if so, the rationale for it.

The fundamental flaw in our argument about God and evil and suffering is that we often believe that God should prevent, protect, or even eradicate them from the world. However, this attitude is limited to our human capacity to comprehend nature. God respects human freedom and gives man his nature, which is the volitional capacity man has in front of his creator [15]. The individual attributes the presence of evil to a lack of divine wisdom, suggesting that God does not sufficiently engage with human history. Mosshammer argues that, since evil is a non-being, it cannot be caused by God [16]. Given that God knows evil and the ability to prevent it through absolute power, it can be concluded that God permits both evil and its potentiality. God, as an embodiment of infinite goodness, allows the existence of evil exclusively to facilitate a greater good, either by protecting some form of good or by enhancing the importance of good itself. The temporality of evil is evident, as it exists relative to and subordinately to the good. It cannot nullify good but only affects it. Shweder et al. asserted that an economy of suffering is an economy of divine order, direction, and management [17]. In the presence of God, events do not occur randomly; all actions undertaken are intended to benefit creation and the course of human history. Von Mises argues that a key characteristic of effective governance is allowing evil to assume a subordinate and

secondary position within the broader structure and management of an ideal universal order [18].

Dembski posited that God, being infinite goodness, does not cause evil; rather, the pains and difficulties present in the universe are inherently intended for the benefit and happiness of humanity [19]. According to Hick, the Irenaean tradition of theodicy explained that God was partially responsible for evil, as man was created imperfectly to achieve perfection through development and growth [20]. The authors highlight that evil functions as a means to an end, as God initially created a world that includes evil. Stump argues that the Augustinian tradition holds that God is not responsible for the evil in the universe, given His infinite goodness and omnipotence. Since God does not wish for suffering, He cannot will evil and suffering [21]. According to Keltz, the Thomistic theodicy asserts that God, though having no defect, is responsible for natural or physical evil, but does not cause it directly; rather, it occurs incidentally [22]. The reliance of creation on God does not imply that God exercises complete control over historical events and the daily activities of human existence. If this were the case, humanity would exist in a state of complete determinism, thereby rendering the notion of freedom meaningless. Divine influence enlightens the human will, directing it to act rationally, particularly through the function of conscience. Walls et al. argue that a personal God of boundless love is the only one who is not willing to afflict or grieve anyone, rather than a God of all power and goodness [23]. This amounts to a classic dilemma that the human intellect cannot fully comprehend. According to Keenan, it was asserted that the coexistence of an all-powerful God and the universe's evil poses a moral, general, and impersonal problem in spontaneous reasoning, common sense, and philosophy [24].

The existence of God is often considered intrinsically connected to the presence of evil. The existence of God is independent of any factors, including evil, which only affects created beings. If evil is characterized as non-being and devoid of any positive essence, it cannot be actualized by God. Evolutionists like Teilhard de Chardin argue that the evolution of the universe involves extinction, leading to the emergence of new, higher life forms that replace older ones [25]. The harm caused by these new forms is an unintended and indirect consequence. If God permits the destruction of lower forms of life for the emergence of higher forms, it follows that God inadvertently allows for the existence of evil. This "permission" frequently presents a dilemma during periods of suffering.

The Moral Evil

Moral evil is a subtopic of moral philosophy that focuses on the role of man in the world's suffering. Man, due to his rational nature and free will, is responsible for much suffering and often creates new ones without intending them. This leads to an inevitable recurrence of evil that man cannot avoid. In the moral government of God, the divine guides the universe to its destined purpose through proper human acts [26]. Man is endowed with freedom of choice, making him a morally

responsible being. Every order requires a rule — natural, divine, or moral. The possibility of evil from his activities shows his inescapable role in nature's degradation. Moral evil is defiance of God's sovereignty and wilful disruption of nature's balance [27]. A person is responsible for God's vindication until they may choose good or evil and accept or reject God. Never pure evil or privation, moral evil is a partial good that distinguishes evil from good [28]. It originates from human passions that obstruct the creative process and lead individuals away from rational thought. Humans endure the weight of moral evil throughout their existence. St. Thomas Aquinas characterizes evil in human will as that which hinders individuals from achieving their proper development towards their ultimate purpose [29]. Aquinas links the malevolence of ignorance to that of guilt and punishment, indicating a deficiency in the knowledge that individuals are expected to possess. If an individual is responsible for this deprivation, it represents a moral deficiency. Aquinas posits that when an individual commits moral evil, he acts irrationally or immorally [30]. The inquiry concerns elucidating the positive aspects of morally reprehensible actions, to attribute a constructive significance to suffering within the Christian framework of faith.

Bernard Lonergan argues that human free will is only upright and good as long as it conforms to intelligence or rationality [31]. He defines moral evil as any act of a rational being that lacks the intelligibility of actual choices that are good and is morally defective and sinful. Wetmore argues that moral evil stems from human flawed decisions and inclinations that automatically manifest as sinful when realized [32]. In the presence of his creator, the person exercises his freedom by upholding the rules of good reason and divine law, which foster virtue; on the other hand, he might deviate from these rules, leading to moral decay and corruption. Throughout human history, moral evil has been a major cause of misery, undermining God's omnipotence and providence [11]. Interpersonal conflict and the adversities of nature continually disrupt the universe's intrinsic balance. The individual compromises both himself and his environment by seeking fulfilment via egocentric aspirations [33]. Christian investigation of evil and suffering goes beyond the scope of human reasoning. It is crucial to investigate the concept of faith and examine the New Testament's perspective on evil and suffering, given the limits of human comprehension of nature.

Human Predicament of Suffering

The human condition is a complex and subjective phenomenon, marked by self-concept and a world filled with flaws and imperfections [34]. This world can be distorted, leading to despair, worries, feelings of guilt and inferiority. Cohen's study reveals that human fixation on life's troubles often leads to a distorted perception of reality, denying the existence of suffering and death [35]. Man's attempts to elude suffering and death often overlook the truths about God's efforts to provide temporal happiness and God's concern to alleviate suffering. Tragedies throughout the globe, including the Holocaust in Germany, the slaughter in

Rwanda, the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, and the most recent disaster in Asia, are making it harder to comprehend pain. Harold argued that the paradox of suffering as a normal path to glory, granted by divine permission, highlights the challenge in embracing it as a mystery [36]. The suffering of innocent individuals can foster the belief that life is a chance-based game, leading to superficial perceptions of the universe as chaotic and irrational. The problem of suffering has led many people, especially philosophers, to be skeptical about God's existence and goodness [37]. This skepticism has generated a worldwide culture of atheism, since many argue that the world's limited order and ubiquitous suffering indicate that God's traits, such as goodness, omnipotence, and omniscience, are finite, and that God is unconcerned with human concerns.

Van Zyl et al critique the psychology of self-fulfilment for overlooking the reality of suffering [38]. Psychologists like Maslow and Rogers view suffering as a manifestation of a lack of self-realization, making it impossible to see why the innocent should suffer. Human growth entails suffering, making it absurd to exalt self-realization as a life free from suffering. Lamont asserted that academicians believe that the greater one's formal and intellectual knowledge, the less suffering they experience [39]. However, this is purely theoretical, as establishing a link between pain as a reality and the collected knowledge is impossible. Some Christians have a distorted view of suffering due to their overly exalted image of God, believing that God is so good that he cannot allow evil and suffering [40]. The mechanistic image of God implies that if everything happens by God, human wisdom, will, and dignity are compromised, and man cannot address suffering. Suffering, caused by physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional forces, disrupts inner human harmony and is exacerbated by human attempts to flee it. This urge for a higher status and destiny necessitates an authentic attitude and self-acceptance, as it is a universal human legacy. The enigma of evil and suffering is a significant factor that challenges human belief in God. In the Old Testament, suffering is seen as passivity and punishment, while the New Testament emphasizes its inevitability and the importance of integrating it into inner conviction. Prophets convey hope that suffering is God's way of educating his people during difficult times.

Suffering is a significant aspect of the Christian life, as it serves to share in the sufferings of Christ and his apostolate. Jesus did not institute the cult of pain and suffering for its own sake, but rather to show his disciples that it is through suffering that we attain the higher divine life. Jesus chose suffering as a way, and there is no salvation from suffering, but salvation in suffering. For Christians, suffering is a seed from which they receive life and the power to share tribulations with others. Suffering can elevate the dignity of those who are downtrodden and humiliated by presenting a struggle against the oppressive burdens they face. In the teachings of Jesus, individuals who endure hardships, regardless of their severity, are dignified by their commitment to the gospel values of love, hope, and perseverance. Christians should resist egotism stemming from fear of suffering and persecution, as this can result in unnecessary burdens and transform Christianity into a tool of

oppression. Rather, they ought to cultivate an objective spirituality of suffering based on the exemplary passion of Christ. Psalm 139 underscores God's comprehensive knowledge of humanity and its history, affirming that God remains present in all circumstances. The gospels do not portray an omnipotent God capable of fulfilling any desire. Even Jesus, whose incarnation is viewed as a revelation to the world, is subject to the influence of malevolent forces. Christians, taking on the role of Christ, should serve as a beacon of light amid evil and suffering. Christians should not view suffering as a punishment, but rather as a test with a time limit. Their intelligence enables them to quickly decide whether to accept or reject grace, thereby elevating them to participate in the divine order of life. Only through divine grace can Christians recognize that, although Jesus' power was limited, it manifested through weakness rather than omnipotent strength.

Jesus, who triumphed over his enemies, urged his disciples to rely on people's hospitality, turn the other cheek, travel extra miles, leave the dead to bury themselves, and abandon material possessions. Jesus challenges Christians to face evil and suffering without evasion, highlighting that faith in God alone is not immune to harm. At Gethsemane, Jesus accepted persecution and offered it for world redemption, making him the head of the restored human race. Piper stresses the atoning effects of Jesus' passion, which rested on his willingness to give his life for sinners in perfect obedience to God's judgment [41]. Christians must articulate a spirituality of suffering, highlighting the universal experience of suffering while cleansing faith from self-love and transient worldly attachments. The Stoics focused on the human ability to endure suffering, both physical and mental, thereby contrasting with the perspectives found in the New Testament [42]. The New Testament emphasizes the spiritual dimension, portraying Satan as capable only of targeting the flesh, which connects individuals to the material realm. Christians are encouraged to transcend the Stoics' constrained, materialistic perspective, enduring suffering with patience, free of fear and anxiety, to avoid rebellion. Suffering is not caused by God and cannot be justified without considering its kind and cause. Theology or philosophy that glorifies suffering as a form of redemptive suffering must be rejected as unnecessary suffering. Suffering forms the journey, becoming a paradox of experience and posing a journey and a story of contrast. To experience a real-life situation and accept it, one must accept that life encompasses both suffering and comfort. For inner peace to thrive, one must count gains in life at the expense of losses, which might be painful but calls for personal dedication, commitment, and sacrifice.

Conclusion

This study advances the contemporary discourse on evil and suffering by arriving at several findings that differ in emphasis and integration from much existing research. Unlike approaches that either reduce suffering to a purely moral failure, a psychological malfunction, or a speculative metaphysical puzzle, this work demonstrates that suffering must be understood as a structural and

unavoidable dimension of created existence, inseparably linked to human finitude, freedom, and historical development. A key finding is that evil, consistently interpreted through the classical tradition as privation rather than substance, cannot be treated as an independent force competing with divine goodness. Instead, suffering emerges as a contingent reality permitted within the created order, not as a contradiction of God's goodness but as a condition that makes possible moral responsibility, spiritual growth, and authentic human agency. This integrated position distinguishes the present study from dualistic, deterministic, and overly rationalistic accounts that either externalize evil or attribute it directly to divine causation. Furthermore, this research departs from interpretations that either glorify suffering uncritically or dismiss it as meaningless. By synthesizing Thomistic metaphysics, Augustinian moral theology, evolutionary perspectives, and New Testament spirituality, the study establishes that suffering possesses no intrinsic redemptive value in itself, yet acquires meaning through human freedom, moral response, and divine grace. This balanced conclusion challenges both secular skepticism, which sees suffering as evidence against divine providence, and distorted religious views that treat suffering as divinely willed punishment. The study thus clarifies that suffering is neither illusory nor absolute, neither meaningless nor inherently sanctifying, but relational — its significance depends on how it is encountered, interpreted, and transformed within the moral and spiritual life of the person.

The principal contribution of this research lies in its systematic reconciliation of philosophical reasoning and Christian theology without collapsing one into the other. By maintaining the distinction between metaphysical explanation, moral responsibility, and spiritual meaning, the study offers a coherent framework that avoids speculative excess while remaining faithful to empirical human experience. It contributes to scholarship by showing that the problem of suffering is not solved by abstract theodicies but is illuminated through an integrated anthropology that respects human freedom, acknowledges historical reality, and affirms divine goodness without simplification. In practical terms, this research provides theological and philosophical resources for responding to suffering without denial, despair, or moral distortion. It reframes suffering as a call to responsible action, solidarity, and hope, rather than as a justification for passivity or fatalism. By emphasizing that evil is temporary, derivative, and ultimately subordinate to the good, the study reinforces a hopeful yet realistic vision of human existence. In doing so, it contributes meaningfully to ongoing debates in philosophy of religion, moral theology, and pastoral reflection by offering a disciplined, coherent, and humanly credible understanding of suffering within the broader horizon of meaning and purpose.

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