

Theodicy: The Neutral Solution Summary

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

WHY WOULD GOD DO THIS?

EXCESSIVE SUFFERING

THE WEIGHTINESS OF THE FOSSIL RECORD

THE HELPFUL SOLUTION

Ver.1.0

By Richard Beobide

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Thanks To God

A Special Thank You To God Our Heavenly Father who was in Christ
Who reconciled us unto Himself.

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Citation Note on the Use of Grok

(xAI Large Language Model) In the preparation of this work, the author consulted Grok, a large language model developed by xAI, as a scholarly research assistant. Grok was used for the following purposes:

- Conducting line-by-line analyses of manuscript drafts;
- Verifying biblical exegesis, paleontological data, and philosophical arguments against primary sources;
- Identifying areas requiring clarification, consistency, or refinement;
- Providing structural feedback, formatting suggestions, and scholarly citations; and
- Assisting with preliminary drafts of specific sections for the author's review and revision.

All queries to Grok were made in real time between May and June 2026. The author retained full editorial control at every stage. Every theological claim, exegetical decision, and final wording in The Neutral Solution Theodicy is the author's own. Grok functioned as a research and writing assistant, not as a co-author.

Two sections were drafted by Grok at the author's request after the author determined he was unable to produce a suitably finished scholarly formulation on his own:

- "Divine Commands and Progressive Ordering in Genesis 1: A Non-Ad Hoc Framework for Scriptural Silence on Pre-Fall Carnivory within the Neutral Solution Theodicy"; and
- "Suffering & Horrendous Evil: Response to Marilyn McCord Adams."

In both cases, the core theological ideas and conceptual framework were developed by the author. The author subsequently reviewed, revised, and approved the final versions of these sections.

Recommended Citation

Grok. (2026). Assistance in the development of The Neutral Solution Theodicy by Richard Beobide [AI language model]. xAI. <https://x.ai/grok>

Note to Readers and Institutions: As of 2026, standard academic citation practices for large language models are still evolving. The format above reflects current best-practice recommendations for acknowledging substantial AI assistance in scholarly work.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The Problem of Evil and Deep-Time Animal Suffering

The problem of evil remains one of the most enduring challenges to theistic belief. Philosophers commonly distinguish between the logical problem of evil (which claims that God and any evil are logically incompatible) and the evidential problem of evil (which argues that the quantity, distribution, and apparent gratuitousness of evil make God's existence improbable). While much attention has been given to moral evil arising from human actions, the suffering of non-human animals presents a distinct and particularly difficult aspect of the evidential problem.

Unlike human suffering, animal suffering lacks an obvious connection to moral responsibility or character formation. Animals are generally understood to be non-moral agents; they do not sin or exercise morally relevant free will. Consequently, widespread pain, predation, and death in the animal kingdom have long posed a serious challenge to divine goodness.

This challenge becomes significantly more acute when the deep-time dimension of animal suffering is considered. Paleontological evidence indicates that predation; injury, disease, and death were persistent features of the biosphere for hundreds of millions of years before the appearance of anatomically modern humans. The fossil record contains extensive evidence of active predation, including bite marks, healed injuries, coprolites, and mass death assemblages across multiple geological periods. These realities predate not only human moral agency but also, according to prevailing scientific chronologies, the existence of any creatures possessing the cognitive capacities associated with moral responsibility.

The deep-time character of animal suffering intensifies the evidential problem in several ways. It removes the possibility of attributing all animal suffering to human sin, raises difficult questions about divine providence over vast periods in which suffering appears gratuitous, and forces theists to consider whether a perfectly good God would permit a natural order marked by predation and death for eons before the arrival of moral agents.

1.2 The Tension Between Genesis 1:31 and the Fossil Record

Within the Christian tradition, this challenge is sharpened by the specific claims of Genesis. Genesis 1:31 states that after completing the six days of creation, "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good." Traditional interpretations have often understood this declaration to imply an original state of harmony in which death and predation were absent.

This reading stands in significant tension with the fossil record. If predation, pain, and death were already widespread for vast periods of geological time, then the unqualified declaration that creation was "very good" becomes difficult to maintain. Furthermore, Romans 5:12 states that "sin came into the world through one man, and death through

sin,” a passage frequently interpreted as indicating that death itself entered creation as a consequence of human disobedience.

The resulting tension is twofold: How can a creation containing millions of years of animal suffering be described as “very good”? And how can death be said to have entered the world through human sin when paleontological evidence shows that death was already pervasive long before humans existed?

Previous attempts to resolve this tension have generally followed one of two strategies. Some have reinterpreted the scientific data through young-earth models that attribute the fossil record to catastrophic events associated with the Fall or the Flood. Others have reinterpreted the biblical texts, arguing that “death” in Romans 5:12 refers only to human or spiritual death, or that “very good” does not exclude natural processes such as predation. While both approaches have been sincerely motivated, they have faced substantial criticism on scientific or exegetical grounds. This thesis seeks a third approach that takes both the biblical text and the fossil record seriously without requiring the rejection of well-supported claims from either domain.

1.3 Research Questions

This thesis is guided by the following primary research question:

How can the biblical affirmation that God declared creation “very good” (Genesis 1:31) and the claim that death entered the world through human sin (Romans 5:12) be coherently reconciled with the paleontological evidence of widespread animal suffering and death long before the existence of humanity?

Subsidiary questions include:

- What is the most textually responsible interpretation of the divine commands and pronouncements in Genesis 1–3, particularly regarding the dietary provision (Genesis 1:29–30) and the “very good” declaration?
- Is it philosophically coherent to posit a category of “amoral-but-good” realities within creation?
- In what ways might the pre-Fall natural order have functioned pedagogically for the first human beings?
- How does the proposed framework engage with contemporary philosophical discussions of horrendous evil, particularly those developed by Marilyn McCord Adams?
- What are the broader theological and ethical implications of this framework?

1.4 Thesis Statement and Central Argument

This thesis proposes and defends the Neutral Solution Theodicy. Its central claim is that the pre-Fall creation existed in a genuinely amoral-but-good state. In this state, predation, suffering, and death among animals were real and observable phenomena, yet they remained morally neutral because animals lack the capacities necessary for moral agency and responsibility.

God structured the pre-Fall natural order so that it would serve a pedagogical purpose. The observable realities of predation, injury, and death among non-moral creatures provided Adam with a direct and concrete demonstration of the disorder and suffering that would result from moral disobedience. This living testimony supplied Adam with experiential knowledge of the consequences of sin, thereby enabling him to make a genuinely informed moral choice at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The same realities had already been laid down and preserved in the fossil record long before Adam's time, and would later function as a witness for future generations.

Following the Fall, moral evil entered human experience and the created order experienced a significant rupture. The same natural processes of predation and death continued, but now within a context marked by moral disorder and alienation from God. While these processes had previously served a pedagogical function in an amoral framework, they now also testified to the consequences of human rebellion. The Neutral Solution maintains that the fossil record is not evidence against divine goodness. Rather, it forms part of the created order's testimony to the nature of moral responsibility and its consequences, offering later scientific generations insight into the conditions under which Adam made his original moral decision.

1.5 Scope, Limitations, and Delimitations

This thesis focuses on the development and defense of the Neutral Solution Theodicy as a response to the specific problem of deep-time animal suffering in relation to Genesis 1–3 and Romans 5:12. It integrates biblical exegesis, philosophical analysis, and engagement with paleontological data.

Limitations include the following: the thesis does not attempt a comprehensive theodicy addressing all forms of evil; it does not offer new scientific research; and the philosophical analysis of animal consciousness is necessarily limited by current scientific understanding. The study operates within a broadly Christian theological framework.

Delimitations: The exegetical work is restricted primarily to Genesis 1–3 and Romans 5:12. The philosophical discussion focuses on the conditions necessary for informed moral choice rather than a full defense of any particular theory of free will. While the thesis interacts with Marilyn McCord Adams's work on horrendous evil, it does not attempt an exhaustive treatment of her broader project.

1.6 Methodology

This thesis employs an interdisciplinary methodology that integrates biblical exegesis, philosophical analysis, and constructive engagement with scientific data.

The biblical-exegetical component adopts a literary and grammatical-historical method, with particular attention to the narrative structure and recurring command patterns in Genesis 1–3. The philosophical component draws upon analytic philosophy of religion, employing distinctions between moral and amoral realities and examining the conditions for informed free will. The scientific component treats the fossil record as genuine empirical data that must be taken seriously, while adopting a critical realist stance toward both scientific and theological knowledge.

The overall argumentative strategy proceeds abductively, arguing that the Neutral Solution offers the most coherent account of the combined biblical, philosophical, and empirical data.

1.7 Original Contribution to Scholarship

This thesis makes several distinct contributions:

- It proposes a new theodicy—the Neutral Solution—that develops the category of the amoral-but-good state and the concept of the witness of backward reversion, offering a framework in which pre-human animal suffering serves a positive pedagogical purpose related to human moral agency.
- It advances biblical scholarship through its identification and application of the antecedent literary pattern in Genesis 1, providing a textually grounded explanation for the scriptural silence concerning pre-Fall carnivory.
- It contributes to the science-and-religion dialogue by modeling a non-reductive integrative approach that treats scientific data as genuine knowledge while maintaining theological integrity.
- It extends existing discussions of horrendous evil by applying Marilyn McCord Adams’s framework to pre-human suffering while locating the ultimate defeat of evil in the redemptive work of Christ and the eschatological renewal of creation.

1.8 Chapter Overview

Following this introduction,

Chapter 2 surveys existing approaches to animal suffering and identifies the specific gaps the Neutral Solution seeks to address.

Chapter 3 offers a detailed exegetical analysis of Genesis 1–3.

Chapter 4 develops the philosophical foundations of the argument.

Chapter 5 presents the core constructive proposal.

Chapter 6 engages paleontological data.

Chapter 7 addresses major objections.

Chapter 8 explores broader theological and practical implications.

Chapter 9 offers concluding reflections.

Chapter 2: Literature Review – Existing Approaches to Animal Suffering and Theodicy

This chapter surveys major approaches to the problem of animal suffering within theistic thought and identifies the specific gaps that the Neutral Solution Theodicy seeks to address.

2.1 Classical and Modern Theodicies and Their Treatment of Non-Human Suffering

Early Christian responses to evil, most notably those developed by Augustine, located the origin of evil and suffering in the misuse of free will by rational creatures. Augustine's privation theory of evil and his emphasis on the Fall as the decisive event that introduced disorder into an originally good creation provided a framework in which suffering could be understood as a consequence of sin. While Augustine acknowledged suffering in the non-human world, his primary focus remained on human sin and its consequences. He did not develop a sustained theodicy specifically addressing the moral status of animal pain and death.

Medieval theologians such as Thomas Aquinas built upon Augustinian foundations while incorporating Aristotelian categories of natural order and divine providence. Aquinas argued that apparent imperfections or sufferings within the natural world often serve greater goods within the whole of creation. However, his treatment of animal suffering remained limited and largely subsumed under broader discussions of divine governance.

In the modern period, Gottfried Leibniz's Theodicy (1710) famously defended the claim that this is the "best of all possible worlds," arguing that apparent evils contribute to a greater overall harmony. Leibniz's system, like many classical accounts, struggled to provide a convincing explanation for the suffering of non-rational creatures. Later free-will defenses, most notably Alvin Plantinga's influential formulation, successfully addressed the logical problem of evil with respect to moral evil arising from creaturely freedom. These defenses have proven less effective, however, when applied to natural evil in general and to animal suffering in particular, since animals are not moral agents in the relevant sense.

John Hick's soul-making theodicy represented a significant development by shifting attention from the origin of evil to its potential instrumental value in moral and spiritual development. Hick argued that a world containing suffering and challenge is necessary for the formation of mature moral character. While this approach has proven fruitful for understanding certain dimensions of human suffering, its application to non-human animals remains highly problematic. Animals do not appear to undergo the kind of moral or spiritual growth that would justify their suffering under a soul-making framework.

Throughout much of the classical and modern tradition, non-human animal suffering received relatively little sustained attention. When addressed at all, it was often treated as

a secondary issue or as an unfortunate but necessary byproduct of a law-governed natural order.

2.2 Young-Earth and Old-Earth Creationist Responses to the Fossil Record

Within evangelical and conservative Protestant theology, responses to the fossil record and pre-human suffering have generally followed two broad trajectories: young-earth creationism and various forms of old-earth creationism or theistic evolution.

Young-earth creationists have argued that the fossil record is best explained as the product of catastrophic events associated with the judgment of the Fall or the later judgment of the Flood. On this view, death and predation entered the world only after human sin. While this approach preserves a strong reading of both Genesis 1:31 and Romans 5:12, it faces substantial challenges from multiple scientific disciplines, including radiometric dating, stratigraphy, and cosmology. Critics have argued that young-earth models require extensive ad hoc adjustments to accommodate the empirical data.

Old-earth creationist and progressive creationist positions have sought to accommodate deep time while maintaining that God directly intervened at various points in cosmic and biological history. Some proponents have suggested that animal death prior to the Fall was part of God's original design for a dynamic creation. Others have argued that "death" in Romans 5:12 refers exclusively to human spiritual death. While these approaches are more compatible with mainstream scientific findings than young-earth views, they have been criticized for offering relatively thin theological justifications for why a perfectly good God would create a world containing millions of years of animal suffering before the arrival of moral agents.

Theistic evolutionist perspectives have generally accepted both deep time and common descent while affirming divine guidance of the evolutionary process. These views typically treat animal suffering as an inevitable feature of a world governed by natural laws. While this approach has gained significant traction among scientifically trained Christians, it has often struggled to provide a robust account of why God would permit such extensive suffering among non-moral creatures for vast periods of time.

2.3 Contemporary Philosophical Work on Animal Pain and Theodicy

In recent decades, philosophers of religion have devoted increasing attention to the specific problem of animal suffering. Michael J. Murray's *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw* (2008) represents one of the most substantial treatments of the subject. Murray explores several possible justifications for animal pain, including appeals to natural law and the necessity of predation for ecosystem stability. While Murray's work advances the discussion, he acknowledges that pre-human animal suffering remains particularly difficult to justify on traditional theistic grounds.

Trent Dougherty has developed a sustained “problem of animal pain” argument and explored various theistic responses. Christopher Southgate’s work has emphasized the “groaning” of creation (Romans 8:22) and the eschatological hope of cosmic redemption as important resources for addressing animal suffering.

Marilyn McCord Adams’s influential work on horrendous evils has provided important conceptual tools for thinking about suffering that appears to defeat the possibility of the sufferer’s life being a great good. Although Adams focuses primarily on human horrendous evils, her framework raises difficult questions when applied to animal suffering. If some instances of animal pain are sufficiently severe, then merely appealing to instrumental goods may be insufficient without a corresponding account of how such suffering is ultimately defeated or redeemed.

Despite these valuable contributions, contemporary philosophical discussions have yet to produce a widely accepted theodicy that adequately addresses the specific challenge of deep-time, pre-human predation while remaining in meaningful dialogue with the biblical text.

2.4 Biblical and Theological Treatments of Pre-Fall Death and Carnivory

Biblical scholars and theologians who have engaged the relationship between Genesis and modern science have offered varying interpretations of pre-Fall death and carnivory. John Walton has argued for a functional interpretation of Genesis 1, suggesting that the text primarily concerns the ordering of creation for human habitation rather than making scientific claims about the physical state of the pre-Fall world. C. John Collins has explored the literary features of Genesis 1 and noted that the dietary provision in Genesis 1:29–30 functions as a positive grant of food rather than a comprehensive prohibition of all other forms of consumption.

Other scholars have examined the implications of Romans 5:12 for understanding the relationship between human sin and death. Some have argued that Paul’s statement should be understood as referring specifically to human death or to spiritual death, while others have maintained a broader cosmic scope for the effects of the Fall. These exegetical debates remain active, with no clear scholarly consensus on whether the biblical text requires or permits the existence of animal death prior to the Fall.

Theological treatments have often focused on the cosmic effects of the Fall (Romans 8:19–22) and the hope of future redemption that includes the non-human creation. However, these discussions have not typically been integrated with a detailed account of why God would have permitted extensive animal suffering for vast periods of time before human sin occurred, nor have they connected such an account to the moral conditions surrounding Adam’s original choice.

2.5 Gaps in Current Scholarship That the Neutral Solution Addresses

The survey above reveals several significant gaps in existing scholarship that the Neutral Solution Theodicy seeks to address:

- There remains a lack of robust accounts that treat pre-human animal suffering as serving a positive pedagogical purpose specifically related to human moral agency and informed free will.
- Few accounts have developed a detailed literary analysis of the command patterns in Genesis 1 as a resource for understanding scriptural silence on pre-Fall carnivory.
- There is a need for greater integration between philosophical discussions of animal suffering and careful biblical exegesis.
- Existing theodicies have generally not developed a coherent account of how the fossil record itself might function constructively as a continuing pedagogical witness after the Fall.

The Neutral Solution seeks to occupy this interdisciplinary space by offering a unified framework that takes seriously the biblical text, the philosophical dimensions of suffering and free will, and the empirical data of the fossil record.

2.6 Summary and Transition

This chapter has surveyed major approaches to the problem of animal suffering within theistic theodicy. While each approach offers valuable insights, significant gaps remain—particularly with respect to a theologically rich account of pre-human suffering as divine pedagogy connected to informed human moral choice, and with respect to a constructive theological interpretation of the fossil record itself.

The following chapters develop the Neutral Solution Theodicy as a constructive proposal designed to address these gaps. Chapter 3 turns to a detailed exegetical analysis of Genesis 1–3.

Chapter 3: Biblical Foundations

This chapter examines the biblical foundations of the Neutral Solution Theodicy through a literary and exegetical analysis of Genesis 1–3 and Romans 5:12. Particular attention is given to the recurring patterns in divine speech and the theological implications of the text’s silences.

3.1 The Literary Structure and Command Patterns of Genesis 1 (Days 1–5)

The creation account in Genesis 1 is widely recognized for its highly structured and repetitive literary form. A careful examination reveals a consistent pattern in the way divine commands function across the first five days. On each of these days, God speaks a command that addresses an existing condition within the created order. The command then effects a transition from one functional state to another. Finally, the text emphasizes the new ordered reality that has been established rather than providing an exhaustive description of everything that preceded the command or everything that might still be possible.

This Literary pattern is observable in several examples:

- On Day 1, God addresses the existing darkness by declaring, “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3). The narrative does not state that darkness is eliminated from existence; instead, it records that light is introduced and separated from darkness.
- On Day 2, God commands the formation of an expanse to separate the waters above from the waters below. The waters already existed; the divine word organizes them into functional domains.
- On Day 3, dry land emerges and vegetation is commanded to appear. The emphasis lies on the functional ordering of land and plant life.
- On Days 4 and 5, the luminaries, sea creatures, and birds are established within their respective domains.

In each case, divine speech functions as the primary agent of ordering. The narrative consistently prioritizes what God is establishing through his word over exhaustive descriptions of antecedent conditions.

3.2 The Antecedent Literary Pattern as a Narrative Precedent for Day 6

The consistent pattern observed in Days 1–5 functions as an antecedent literary pattern that serves as a narrative precedent for interpreting the commands given on the sixth day. An antecedent literary pattern refers to a recurring structural or rhetorical feature appearing earlier in a text that provides interpretive guidance for later material.

This approach does not impose external categories upon the text. Rather, it allows the consistent literary method already present in the creation account to inform the reading of Day 6. The pattern demonstrates that God's commands characteristically move creation from one ordered state to another without requiring the complete negation or exhaustive description of everything that came before.

Recognizing this antecedent pattern helps interpreters avoid two common errors: the assumption that divine silence regarding a particular reality necessarily indicates its non-existence, and the assumption that every divine command must function as a universal prohibition of all alternative states.

3.3 The Dietary Provision (Genesis 1:29–30)

On the sixth day, after creating land animals and humanity, God issues the following provision: “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so (Genesis 1:29–30).

Several features of this text are exegetically significant. First, the statement is formulated as a positive grant rather than a prohibition. God declares what he has given for food using the verb *nātan* (“I have given”). He does not state that creatures shall eat only plants, nor does he declare that carnivory shall now cease.

Second, the provision is presented as establishing a harmonious arrangement within the newly ordered creation. Third, the text concludes with the formula “And it was so,” indicating that the commanded provision took effect as part of the ordered reality.

When this provision is read in light of the antecedent literary pattern established in Days 1–5, the silence of the text regarding any prior state of carnivory becomes both intelligible and theologically meaningful. Just as earlier commands brought new order without exhaustively negating every aspect of previous conditions, the dietary provision establishes plant-based food as a God-given resource without requiring the complete eradication of other possible dietary realities.

3.4 The Commands to “Dress and Keep” the Garden (Genesis 2:15) and the Tree (Genesis 2:16–17)

The narrative in Genesis 2 provides important additional context. God places the man in the garden “to work it and keep it” (Genesis 2:15). The Hebrew verb translated “keep” (*šāmar*) frequently carries the sense of guarding, protecting, or watching over something.

This terminology implies the presence of potential threats or dangers within the broader created order over which Adam exercises a form of vice-regency.

Immediately following this commission, God issues the prohibition regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16–17). These two commands—to guard the garden and to refrain from eating of the forbidden tree—frame Adam’s moral responsibility. The command to guard suggests that the garden existed within a larger created order that contained realities requiring protection or vigilance.

3.5 The “Very Good” Declaration (Genesis 1:31) in Context

Following the completion of the sixth day, the text declares: “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). This comprehensive pronouncement attaches to the ordered creation as it has been established through divine speech.

When interpreted in light of the command patterns observed throughout Genesis 1, the declaration affirms the goodness of the functional order that God has brought into being. The presence of amoral natural processes, including predation among non-moral creatures, does not necessarily contradict this declaration if those processes are understood as part of the ordered reality that serves a larger divine purpose. The adverb *mā’ōd* (“very”) intensifies the declaration but does not demand absolute perfection in every conceivable respect. Rather, it affirms the excellence of creation as functionally ordered for its intended purposes, including the moral formation of human beings.

3.6 Romans 5:12 and the Entry of Death Through Human Sin

The apostle Paul writes in Romans 5:12: “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.” A careful reading indicates that Paul is primarily concerned with the entry of sin and its consequences for humanity. The statement that “death spread to all men” focuses on the universal human condition rather than making an explicit claim about the origin of all death throughout the entire created order.

The immediate context of Romans 5 emphasizes the contrast between Adam and Christ as federal heads and the spread of sin and righteousness to human beings. While some interpreters have understood Romans 5:12 as indicating that physical death itself first entered the world through human sin, the grammatical structure and rhetorical focus of the passage suggest a more limited scope. The text highlights the entry of sin and its consequences for human beings rather than making a universal claim about the origin of death in all living creatures.

This exegetical observation opens conceptual space for the proposal that animal death and predation existed in an amoral state before human sin, while human death and the moral dimensions of suffering entered the world through Adam's disobedience.

3.7 Scriptural Silence, Reasonable Inference, and the Pedagogical Purpose of Death

When the literary patterns of Genesis 1, the positive character of the dietary provision (Genesis 1:29–30), and the command to “keep” (guard) the garden (Genesis 2:15) are considered together, the scriptural silence regarding pre-Fall carnivory becomes both intelligible and theologically significant. The text does not explicitly affirm or deny the existence of predation prior to human sin. However, the consistent literary method of divine commands permits the reasonable inference that carnivory and animal death existed in the pre-Fall creation as amoral realities.

Within this framework, the presence of death and predation in the amoral realm prior to human sin served a deliberate pedagogical purpose. Although Adam received a direct verbal command regarding the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, he remained a finite being. The observable reality of death and predation among amoral creatures therefore provided Adam with a concrete reference point for the consequences of moral disorder. Death in the created order functioned as a visible witness to the seriousness of choosing disobedience.

This pedagogical purpose was primarily directed toward Adam's moral formation through his observation of living predation and death. However, because creation is presented as a reliable witness across time (Psalm 19:1-4, Romans 1:19-20 & Job 12:7-10), the extensive record of death and predation preserved in the geological strata also serves as an enduring testimony for subsequent generations.

Chapter 4: Philosophical Framework – The Amoral-but-Good State and Informed Free Will

This chapter develops the philosophical foundations of the Neutral Solution Theodicy. It introduces and defends the central distinction between moral and amoral realities and explains how the pre-Fall natural order could function pedagogically for Adam.

4.1 Defining “Amoral” vs. “Moral” Realities in Creation

A foundational distinction in the Neutral Solution is that between moral and amoral realities within the created order.

Moral realities involve agents capable of moral responsibility, praise, blame, and the violation or fulfillment of moral obligations. Such realities presuppose the existence of beings who can act on the basis of reasons that can be morally evaluated and who can be held accountable for their actions.

Amoral realities, by contrast, occur within the natural order but do not involve moral agents acting in ways that can be evaluated as morally right or wrong. This category includes natural processes such as earthquakes, decay, and predation among creatures that lack the cognitive and volitional capacities necessary for moral agency. The distinction between moral and amoral does not imply that amoral realities are unimportant or fall outside the scope of divine concern. Rather, it recognizes that not every feature of the created world carries moral weight in the same way.

The key claim of the Neutral Solution is that amoral realities do not carry moral culpability and therefore do not require the same kind of moral justification as actions performed by moral agents.

4.2 The Nature of Animal Suffering: Consciousness, Pain, and Moral Status

Contemporary philosophy and cognitive science generally accept that many animals possess some form of consciousness and are capable of experiencing pain and distress. However, the possession of consciousness and the capacity to feel pain does not automatically entail full moral status or moral agency.

Moral agency typically requires capacities such as the ability to form moral judgments, to act on the basis of reasons that can be evaluated as good or bad, to reflect on one's actions, and to be held responsible for one's choices. While some animals demonstrate sophisticated forms of social behavior and problem-solving, the prevailing consensus is that non-human animals do not possess the full suite of capacities necessary for moral responsibility in the robust sense required for moral praise or blame.

This distinction allows for the recognition that animals can suffer without that suffering being morally evil in itself. The pain experienced by a prey animal during predation is real and significant from the perspective of the animal. Yet because the predator lacks moral agency, the event does not involve a moral agent acting wrongly.

4.3 Can Suffering Be “Good” Without Being Morally Good?

A central philosophical claim of the Neutral Solution is that suffering can possess instrumental value within a larger divine purpose without being morally good in itself.

The thesis does not argue that animal suffering is morally good or that God delights in the pain of creatures. Rather, it argues that certain forms of suffering can possess instrumental value insofar as they serve a legitimate divine purpose. In the case of pre-Fall animal suffering, the Neutral Solution proposes that such suffering possesses instrumental value insofar as it serves the pedagogical purpose of providing Adam with observable evidence of the consequences of moral disobedience.

This position is consistent with the conviction that God's goodness does not require the elimination of all pain from the created order, but rather the absence of morally unjustified evil. Suffering that is genuinely instrumental to a legitimate divine purpose within an amoral context can be affirmed as part of a good creation without implying that the suffering is morally good in itself.

4.4 The Concept of Divine Pedagogy in Scripture and Theology

Scripture frequently presents the natural world as a source of instruction. Job 12:7 states, "But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you." The psalmist declares that "the heavens declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1). Jesus frequently used natural phenomena as teaching tools in his parables.

The concept of divine pedagogy has deep roots in the Christian theological tradition. Patristic and medieval writers often spoke of creation as a "book" through which God communicates truth to human beings. In this framework, the natural order is not merely a neutral backdrop for human existence but can function as a medium through which God teaches and reveals aspects of his character and purposes.

The Neutral Solution builds on this traditional theme by proposing that God structured the pre-Fall natural order so that it would function pedagogically for the first human beings.

4.5 The "Witness of Backward Reversion" – Definition and Justification

Building on the biblical analysis in Chapter 3, the Neutral Solution gives a specific conceptual name to the pedagogical function of the pre-Fall natural order: the witness of backward reversion.

Predation, injury, and death existed among non-moral creatures prior to the Fall without moral significance. After human sin, these same realities continued but now carried the additional weight of moral disorder and alienation from God. The term "backward reversion" highlights this dynamic: the pre-Fall presence of these amoral processes provided Adam with an observable demonstration of what would result from introducing moral disobedience into the created order.

This concept is philosophically important because it supplies the epistemic bridge between the amoral natural realm and human moral responsibility. It allows Adam's choice to be understood as informed rather than naïve, while remaining fully consistent with the literary patterns of divine commands identified in Chapter 3. The same witness continues after the Fall through the preserved fossil record.

4.6 Informed Free Will and the Conditions for Moral Responsibility

A robust account of moral responsibility requires that agents possess sufficient knowledge of the likely consequences of their actions. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, the pre-Fall natural order supplied Adam with the necessary epistemic resources through the living witness of predation and death. This rendered his decision at the tree a genuinely informed moral choice.

The requirement is modest but essential: the agent must have adequate understanding of the fundamental nature of obedience versus disobedience and of the seriousness of the latter. The Neutral Solution maintains that the created order met this threshold without needing to provide Adam with exhaustive knowledge of every possible consequence. The witness of backward reversion furnished the concrete, observable awareness required for moral significance.

4.7 Objections to the Amoral-but-Good Category and Initial Responses

Several objections may be raised against the category of the amoral-but-good.

One common concern is that any form of suffering, even among non-moral creatures, is incompatible with the perfect goodness of God. In response, the Neutral Solution maintains that divine goodness does not require the absence of all pain from the created order, but rather the absence of morally unjustified evil. Suffering that serves a genuine pedagogical purpose within an amoral context does not constitute moral evil.

A second objection holds that God could have achieved the same pedagogical goal through less costly means. While this objection carries weight, the Neutral Solution responds that the actual created order provides a particularly effective form of pedagogy precisely because it is concrete, observable, and integrated into the natural processes of the world.

A third objection concerns the problem of excessive or severe suffering even within an amoral framework. This objection will be addressed more fully in Chapter 7. The initial response is that the amoral character of pre-Fall suffering limits the degree to which it can be classified as “horrendous” in the technical sense developed by Marilyn McCord Adams, while still acknowledging its genuine negative value from the perspective of the creatures involved.

These initial responses indicate that the amoral-but-good category is philosophically defensible.

It is important to note that not all suffering carries the same moral and existential weight. Suffering that occurs among non-moral creatures remains within an amoral framework and lacks the dimensions of moral meaning, injustice, and self-reflective anguish that characterize moral suffering. This distinction becomes especially relevant when engaging philosophical categories such as “horrendous evil,” which presuppose the moral agency

and narrative self-understanding that animals do not possess. A fuller response to the problem of horrendous evil will be offered in Chapter 7.

Chapter 5: The Pre-Fall World as Pedagogical Arena

This chapter presents the core constructive argument of the Neutral Solution Theodicy. It explains how the pre-Fall natural order functioned as a pedagogical arena and how the Fall altered the moral status of suffering.

5.1 The Pre-Fall World as an Amoral-but-Good Pedagogical Arena

The Neutral Solution Theodicy proposes that the pre-Fall creation functioned as an amoral-but-good pedagogical arena. In this framework, the natural order prior to human sin was characterized by real physical processes—including predation, injury, and death among non-moral creatures—yet these processes did not carry moral significance. Because animals lack the capacities necessary for moral agency, the suffering they experienced remained within the category of the amoral.

This amoral natural order was not morally defective. Rather, it was good in the sense that it served a deliberate divine purpose. God structured the pre-Fall world in such a way that it would provide Adam with concrete, observable instruction concerning the nature and consequences of moral choice. The pedagogical function of the created order was therefore intentional. The realities of predation and death among animals served as a living illustration of what would occur if humanity turned away from God’s command and introduced moral disorder into the world.

This understanding preserves both the unqualified goodness of God’s original creative act (Genesis 1:31) and the genuine tragedy of the Fall. The pre-Fall world was good because it was ordered according to divine wisdom and because it equipped the first human beings for responsible moral agency.

5.2 Adam’s Epistemic Situation

Adam’s decision at the tree was made with sufficient epistemic resources to render it a genuinely informed moral choice. The pre-Fall natural order provided concrete, observable instruction concerning the nature and consequences of moral disobedience.

Adam was placed in the garden with the explicit commission to “work it and keep it” (Genesis 2:15). The language of guarding implies the presence of potential threats or dangers within the broader created order. At the same time, he received the dietary provision establishing plant-based food for both humans and animals (Genesis 1:29–30). These commands situated Adam within an ordered but not exhaustively pacified creation.

From these conditions, Adam could reasonably infer several important truths: that suffering and death were real and recurring features of the created order, that these realities involved significant negative experiences for the creatures involved, and that human disobedience could plausibly result in the extension or intensification of such realities into the human and moral sphere. In other words, the suffering and death Adam observed in the animal world would become the lived reality of himself and his family should he choose to disobey God.

The Neutral Solution does not claim that Adam possessed exhaustive scientific knowledge of the fossil record or of deep time. It claims only that he possessed sufficient experiential knowledge of the fundamental nature of predation and death to understand, in concrete terms, what was at stake in his decision to obey or disobey God.

5.3 The Role of the Living Creation as Witness

The “witness of backward reversion” operated primarily through the living creation. The natural order provided Adam with immediate, observable examples of predation and death, giving him concrete knowledge of the consequences of moral disobedience. While the fossil record had already preserved these same underlying realities across deep time, it was not directly accessible to Adam in an experiential way. In the post-Fall context, however, this preserved record continues to function as a witness to subsequent generations.

The concept of reversion remains important. Prior to the Fall, predation and death occurred within an amoral framework — real and painful, yet morally neutral because they involved no moral agents. After human sin, these same natural processes continued, but now within a profoundly disordered moral context. Moral evil penetrated human thought, relationships, and systems of power, transforming ordinary natural processes into instruments of injustice, oppression, and cruelty. Human beings began to prey upon one another through violence, exploitation, and corrupt laws. The observable presence of these realities before the Fall thus gave Adam a concrete reference point for what moral disobedience would bring about — not merely more suffering, but a moral and relational disorder that would distort every aspect of human life and society.

5.4 The Dietary Command as a Transition Within an Already Existing Order

The dietary provision of Genesis 1:29–30 must be understood in light of the antecedent literary pattern established in Days 1–5. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, divine commands in Genesis 1 characteristically bring about transitions toward greater order without requiring the complete negation of all prior conditions.

The dietary command establishes plant-based food as a God-given provision for both humans and animals. It does not, however, explicitly prohibit carnivory or declare that all predation must immediately cease. When read according to the established literary pattern, the command functions as a positive ordering of food sources within the broader creation rather than as a comprehensive elimination of all other dietary possibilities.

This reading supports the conclusion that carnivory could have existed in the pre-Fall creation as an amoral reality. The dietary command represents a further transition toward harmonious provision rather than a total reversal of all previous natural processes.

5.5 The Fall as a Rupture That Introduces Moral Evil and Amplifies Suffering

The Fall constitutes a decisive rupture in the created order. Through Adam’s disobedience, moral evil entered human experience and the harmonious relationship

between humanity and the rest of creation was disrupted. Romans 5:12 indicates that sin and death spread through Adam to all humanity. The Neutral Solution maintains that this passage primarily addresses the entry of moral and spiritual death into the human realm while remaining compatible with the prior existence of amoral death among non-human creatures.

Following the Fall, the same natural processes of predation and death continued, but now within a context marked by moral disorder, alienation from God, and the curse pronounced upon the ground (Genesis 3:17–19). Suffering that had previously been amoral acquired new moral and existential significance. What had served as a pedagogical witness before the Fall now also testified to the consequences of human rebellion.

The Fall therefore did not introduce death ex nihilo into a previously deathless world. Rather, it introduced moral evil and transformed the meaning and experience of suffering and death within the human and moral sphere.

5.6 Post-Fall Continuity: The Fossil Record as Enduring Divine Pedagogy

One of the distinctive features of the Neutral Solution is its claim that the fossil record continues to function as divine pedagogy after the Fall. While the living realities of predation and death provided Adam with a witness of backward reversion, these same realities had already been preserved in the fossil record across deep time, long before Adam's existence. This preserved record now serves subsequent generations as a testimony to both the original created order and the consequences of turning away from God.

This ongoing pedagogical function does not require that every observer correctly interpret the fossil record. It requires only that the record stands as an objective witness to the kind of natural processes that existed when humanity was given moral responsibility. For those who approach the record with theological sensitivity, it can continue to instruct concerning the gravity of moral choice and the reality of suffering that results from disorder.

In this way, the empirical data of paleontology is not treated as inherently hostile to faith. Rather, it is understood as part of the created order's testimony, capable of serving a constructive theological purpose when interpreted within the framework of the Neutral Solution.

5.7 Christological Implications ("Christ as Prey" and the Absorption of Suffering)

The Neutral Solution carries significant Christological implications that extend beyond the natural order into the moral realm introduced by the Fall.

In the person of Jesus Christ, God entered not only the physical conditions of suffering and death that had characterized the pre-Fall created order, but also the moral conditions of predation that emerged after human sin. The language of "Christ as Prey" captures the reality that the incarnate Son voluntarily subjected Himself to a world in which predation had become embedded within human systems. After the Fall, predation was no longer

limited to the amoral interactions between animals. It became operative through human laws, institutions, and power structures that enabled moral beings to prey upon other moral beings. Christ knowingly entered this fallen system of moral evil and injustice, allowing Himself to be preyed upon by the very structures of human sin.

Moreover, Christ's suffering was uniquely profound because He experienced forms of anguish that are only possible for moral beings. While amoral creatures may suffer physically through predation, they do not endure the continuous mental and moral torment of knowing they are being unjustly destroyed, nor do they carry the weight of anticipating the full consequences of the evil they are facing. Christ, however, suffered both before and on the cross with full awareness. He experienced profound mental and moral anguish in Gethsemane as He contemplated the cup He was about to drink, and He endured the moral horror of the cross itself — being unjustly condemned, mocked, and executed through the very systems of human predation He had come to redeem.

In doing so, Christ did not merely absorb amoral suffering. He took upon Himself the full weight of moral evil and its consequences. He entered the system of human predation as the innocent victim and allowed it to do its worst to Him. Knowing not only the moral damage humanity had already committed, but every form of evil that would later emerge throughout history, Christ willingly submitted to the full scope of moral evil. This went far beyond the physical suffering found in the amoral order of nature, for it involved the moral horror of injustice, betrayal, and human cruelty carried out through corrupt systems of power.

In this act, He fulfilled the ancient declaration that He would “lead captivity captive” (Ephesians 4:8). This phrase speaks of Christ's decisive victory over the powers that held humanity in bondage. Through His death and resurrection, He conquered the very system of moral evil and injustice He had entered. What once held moral creatures captive was now taken captive by Christ. He absorbed and defeated the moral disorder that had corrupted both human relationships and the created order. The resurrection and the promise of cosmic renewal (Romans 8:19–22) point toward the ultimate defeat of both natural and moral predation, as all creation is liberated from the bondage of sin and death.

Chapter 6: Interdisciplinary Engagement – Science, Paleontology, and Theology

This chapter engages the fossil record as empirical data and explores how paleontological evidence can be integrated constructively within the framework of the Neutral Solution Theodicy.

6.1 The Fossil Record as Empirical Data: Strengths and Limitations

The fossil record constitutes one of the most significant bodies of empirical evidence available for understanding the history of life on Earth. Paleontology has established, with a high degree of confidence, that complex multicellular life has existed for hundreds of millions of years and that predation, injury, disease, and death were widespread features of the biosphere long before the appearance of anatomically modern humans.

The strengths of the fossil record as empirical data are considerable. It provides extensive stratigraphic documentation across geological periods, preserves behavioral evidence such as bite marks, healed injuries, and predator-prey interactions, and demonstrates consistency with other scientific disciplines including radiometric dating, molecular clocks, and comparative anatomy.

At the same time, the fossil record has inherent limitations. It is incomplete, with significant biases toward organisms possessing hard body parts and toward certain depositional environments. Soft-tissue preservation is rare, and behavioral inferences must often be drawn from indirect evidence. Furthermore, the fossil record does not directly reveal the subjective experience of suffering. While it can demonstrate physical trauma and death, it cannot quantify the intensity or phenomenological character of pain experienced by ancient organisms.

These limitations do not undermine the central empirical claim relevant to this thesis: that predation and death among non-human organisms were persistent features of the natural world for vast periods of geological time prior to human existence.

6.2 Deep Time, Eras, and the Preservation of Pre-Fall Realities

The Neutral Solution Theodicy operates comfortably within a framework of deep time. The thesis does not require a specific chronological model but is compatible with the mainstream scientific consensus that the Earth is approximately 4.5 billion years old and that complex animal life has existed for at least 600 million years.

Within this deep-time framework, the fossil record preserves evidence of predation across multiple geological eras, including the Cambrian, Ordovician, Devonian, Carboniferous, Permian, Triassic, Jurassic, Cretaceous, and Cenozoic periods. Iconic examples include Cambrian anomalocaridids with grasping appendages adapted for predation, Devonian

arthrodire fish showing clear bite marks on prey, Mesozoic marine reptiles with evidence of active hunting, and Cenozoic mammals bearing healed injuries from attacks.

This long temporal span is significant for the Neutral Solution. It indicates that the natural processes of predation and death were not brief or anomalous features of the pre-Fall world but persistent characteristics of the biosphere across vast stretches of geological time.

6.3 Predation, Extinction, and the “Backward Reversion” Motif in Light of Paleontology

Paleontological evidence provides concrete illustration of the “witness of backward reversion” motif. The fossil record contains numerous examples of predator-prey interactions preserved in remarkable detail, including bite marks on bones, coprolites containing the remains of prey species, healed injuries on prey animals, and rare instances of predator and prey preserved together in the act of predation.

These phenomena demonstrate that suffering and death were integral to the functioning of ancient ecosystems. From the perspective of the Neutral Solution, such evidence does not contradict the goodness of the pre-Fall creation. Instead, it testifies to the kind of natural order that existed when humanity was given moral responsibility.

Many of the same predatory strategies and anatomical adaptations visible in the fossil record continue in the present-day biosphere. This continuity suggests that the Fall did not fundamentally alter the basic physical processes of predation but rather introduced moral and spiritual dimensions to the experience of suffering within the human context.

6.4 The Non-Additive and Private Nature of Conscious Suffering

Suffering is experienced subjectively within the consciousness of individual organisms. It cannot be straightforwardly aggregated into a collective “total” of evil in the way that physical quantities can be measured. The fossil record can demonstrate the physical correlates of suffering—trauma, injury, and death—but it cannot provide direct access to the qualitative experience of pain as it was felt by ancient creatures.

This recognition has two important consequences for the Neutral Solution. First, it cautions against attempts to quantify pre-Fall suffering in a manner that would allow for simple cost-benefit calculations regarding divine goodness. Second, it reinforces the claim that the primary theological significance of the fossil record lies not in the sheer quantity of suffering it records, but in its capacity to serve as an observable witness to the nature of mortality and the consequences of moral disorder.

6.5 Methodological Reflections on Integrating Scientific and Theological Knowledge

The integration of scientific and theological knowledge requires careful methodological reflection. The Neutral Solution adopts a non-reductive integrative approach. This approach affirms the integrity of scientific inquiry within its proper domain while maintaining that scientific findings can be brought into constructive dialogue with theological claims.

Scientific data are treated as genuine sources of knowledge about the physical world, not as neutral or hostile to theological reflection by default. At the same time, theological interpretation is not required to conform to every scientific theory or to abandon well-supported empirical claims. The thesis maintains a critical realist stance with respect to both scientific and theological knowledge.

This methodological stance avoids two common pitfalls in science-and-religion dialogue. It rejects the tendency of some theological approaches to dismiss or radically reinterpret scientific evidence when it appears to conflict with traditional readings of Scripture. At the same time, it resists the reduction of theological questions to purely scientific ones.

6.6 Case Studies: Specific Fossil Evidence and Its Theological Interpretation

Several specific examples from the fossil record illustrate the interpretive approach advocated by the Neutral Solution.

- Cambrian Period: Creatures such as *Anomalocaris* possessed sophisticated grasping and crushing appendages clearly adapted for predation. These early examples of active hunting demonstrate that predatory behavior was present among some of the earliest complex animals.
- Devonian Period: Arthropod-like placoderms such as *Dunkleosteus* provide clear evidence of active predation, with bite marks preserved on the remains of prey species.
- Mesozoic Era: Numerous examples of predation among marine reptiles and dinosaurs have been documented, including specimens showing bite marks, stomach contents containing prey remains, and rare cases of predator and prey preserved together.
- Cenozoic Era: Being more recent, Cenozoic fossils offer particularly clear examples of mammalian predation, including saber-toothed cats and dire wolves, along with prey species bearing healed injuries.

From the perspective of the Neutral Solution, these case studies are not interpreted as evidence against divine goodness. Instead, they are understood as concrete manifestations

of the amoral natural order that could function pedagogically by demonstrating to moral agents the reality and gravity of mortality and suffering.

Chapter 7: Engagement with Major Objections

This chapter addresses the most significant objections to the Neutral Solution Theodicy and offers responses grounded in the framework developed in previous chapters.

7.1 The “Excessive Suffering” Objection and the Loaded Question

One of the most persistent objections is that the amount or distribution of animal suffering across deep time appears excessive. Critics argue that even if some degree of suffering could serve a pedagogical purpose, the sheer scale far exceeds what would be necessary.

This objection frequently takes the form of a loaded question: “Why would a good God allow so much suffering?” The Neutral Solution responds by challenging several assumptions embedded in the question. First, the objection presupposes that finite observers possess a reliable method for determining how much suffering would be “excessive” for achieving a divine pedagogical purpose. However, because conscious suffering is private and non-additive, there is no straightforward way to calculate a total quantity of suffering or to determine an objectively optimal threshold.

Second, the objection often assumes that the primary purpose of pre-Fall suffering was to maximize some measurable good. The Neutral Solution proposes instead that the purpose was to provide a concrete, observable witness of backward reversion. Effectiveness in this pedagogical role does not necessarily correlate directly with the total quantity of suffering.

Third, the objection sometimes rests on the assumption that God is obligated to minimize suffering to the greatest extent possible. The Neutral Solution maintains that divine goodness does not require the minimization of all suffering, but rather the absence of morally unjustified evil. Suffering that occurs within an amoral context and serves a genuine pedagogical function does not constitute moral evil, even if it is significant in scale.

When the thesis states that divine goodness requires “the absence of morally unjustified evil,” it is making an important distinction. Divine goodness does not require the complete elimination of all pain, difficulty, or suffering from the created order. Instead, it requires the absence of evil that has no moral justification — that is, suffering or harm that cannot be accounted for by any good purpose or legitimate divine reason.

In the framework of the Neutral Solution, this distinction is crucial. Not all suffering carries the same moral status. Suffering that occurs among non-moral creatures (such as animals) exists within an amoral framework. While such suffering is real and has negative value from the perspective of the creatures involved, it does not involve moral wrongdoing or moral culpability. Therefore, its presence in creation does not contradict divine goodness, provided it serves a legitimate purpose — in this case, a pedagogical one.

By contrast, morally unjustified evil would be suffering that results from moral wrongdoing without any sufficient moral reason for its permission. The Neutral Solution maintains that God's goodness is compatible with the existence of amoral suffering (such as pre-Fall animal predation), but incompatible with moral evil that lacks justification. This understanding allows the thesis to affirm both the reality of suffering in the natural world and the perfect goodness of God.

7.2 Horrendous Evil and Animal Suffering – Response to Marilyn McCord Adams

While Adams' framework was developed primarily with human suffering in mind, it raises important questions when applied to animal suffering. The Neutral Solution maintains a clear distinction between amoral suffering and moral suffering. Pre-Fall animal suffering, though real and painful, occurred within an amoral context. Animals lack moral agency and the capacity for narrative self-understanding; therefore, their suffering does not carry the existential or moral weight required for it to qualify as "horrendous" in Adams' technical sense.

By contrast, moral suffering — particularly the kind experienced by human beings — involves additional dimensions of injustice, moral agency, self-reflection, and the potential destruction of meaning. It is this category of suffering that more closely aligns with Adams' description of horrendous evil. The Neutral Solution acknowledges that some instances of human moral suffering may indeed approach or meet the criteria of horrendous evil as Adams defines it.

Christ's suffering stands in a unique position within this framework. As a moral being who possessed full knowledge and voluntary agency, Christ experienced suffering that carried the full weight of moral evil. He was not merely subjected to physical pain but endured profound mental and moral anguish as the innocent victim of human injustice and predation. Yet unlike other cases of horrendous evil, Christ's suffering was not left unresolved. Through His death and resurrection, He defeated the moral evil He had taken upon Himself. In this way, the Neutral Solution affirms that while pre-Fall animal suffering remains outside the category of horrendous evil, the moral evil absorbed and conquered by Christ engages Adams' framework at its deepest level — and ultimately overcomes it.

7.3 Could God Have Achieved the Same Pedagogical Goal with Less Suffering?

A related objection asks why God did not achieve the pedagogical goal of informing Adam through less costly means. Could this not have been accomplished through a smaller scale of suffering, through direct revelation, or through some other less painful method?

Several considerations support the actual means employed in the Neutral Solution. First, direct propositional revelation unaccompanied by concrete experience may be less effective for embodied moral agents. Concrete, observable examples of predation and death provide a more visceral and memorable form of instruction than abstract statements alone.

Second, integrating the pedagogical witness into the natural order itself has the advantage of making the lesson continuously available rather than limited to a single revelatory event. The living creation and the fossil record together provide an enduring testimony that remains accessible across generations.

Third, the use of the existing natural order avoids the need for additional miraculous interventions that might themselves raise questions about divine consistency or hiddenness.

7.4 The Problem of Divine Hiddenness and the Fossil Record

The problem of divine hiddenness raises the question of why God does not make his existence and goodness more obvious. Critics may argue that the presence of deep-time animal suffering actually obscures God's goodness.

The Neutral Solution offers two responses. First, the fossil record is not inherently hidden but is available for investigation by those who study it. The fact that it requires careful interpretation does not mean it is deliberately obscure. Many aspects of the natural world require sustained study and reflection to reveal their meaning.

Second, a certain degree of epistemic distance and ambiguity is consistent with the value of genuine moral freedom.

This statement addresses the problem of divine hiddenness — the question of why God does not make His existence, goodness, and purposes more obvious to human beings. The thesis argues that a degree of epistemic distance (that is, a certain lack of immediate or overwhelming clarity about God) and ambiguity in the created order is not a flaw, but is actually consistent with the value of genuine moral freedom.

In simple terms, if God's existence and purposes were completely obvious and undeniable in every aspect of the natural world, human moral choices would lose much of their significance. Genuine moral freedom requires the ability to respond to God (or to reject Him) without being overwhelmingly compelled by unmistakable evidence. If the fossil record, for example, provided undeniable and immediate proof of divine pedagogy, then belief in God might become almost automatic rather than a meaningful moral response.

By allowing a measure of ambiguity — where the created order can be interpreted in more than one way — God preserves space for responsible inquiry, intellectual struggle, and free moral decision-making. This does not mean that God is deliberately hiding, but that the evidence He has provided (both in creation and in Scripture) contains enough clarity to make faith reasonable, while also containing enough ambiguity to allow for genuine freedom. In this way, the ambiguity of the natural world, including the fossil record, supports rather than undermines the moral seriousness of human response to God.

If God's existence and purposes were overwhelmingly obvious in every aspect of the natural order, the moral significance of human choices might be diminished. The ambiguity of the fossil record when viewed apart from theological interpretation allows space for responsible inquiry and the exercise of faith.

7.5 Charges of Speculation and Ad Hoc Reasoning

A common criticism of theodicies is that they rely on speculative claims or introduce ad hoc hypotheses to rescue the theory from counterevidence. Critics may argue that the concepts of the "amoral-but-good" state and the "witness of backward reversion" are speculative constructions designed to fit the data.

The Neutral Solution responds by grounding its central claims in both biblical exegesis and philosophical analysis that are independently motivated. The literary pattern identified in Genesis 1 provides textual support for understanding divine commands as effecting transitions without exhaustive negation of prior conditions. The philosophical distinction between moral and amoral realities is independently motivated by reflection on the nature of moral agency. While the specific application of these concepts to the fossil record involves constructive inference, the inference is constrained by the need to account for both the biblical text and the empirical data without requiring the rejection of well-supported claims from either domain.

7.6 Young-Earth and Concordist Objections

Young-earth creationists may object that the Neutral Solution concedes too much to mainstream scientific interpretations of the fossil record. They may argue that a proper reading of Scripture requires rejecting deep time and attributing the fossil record primarily to the effects of the Fall or the Flood.

The Neutral Solution acknowledges this objection but maintains that its framework does not require the acceptance of any particular scientific model as infallible. The core theological claims—particularly the pedagogical function of the pre-Fall order and the distinction between amoral and moral suffering—can be maintained across a range of chronological frameworks, provided the empirical reality of pre-human predation is acknowledged.

Concordist approaches that seek detailed scientific information in Genesis 1 may object that the Neutral Solution underinterprets the text by allowing for pre-Fall carnivory. In response, the thesis appeals to the literary analysis developed in Chapter 3, which suggests that the text prioritizes functional ordering and divine purpose over exhaustive physical description.

7.7 Atheistic and Naturalistic Critiques

Atheistic critics may argue that the Neutral Solution, like all theodicies, represents an attempt to rationalize unnecessary suffering in a world that is better explained naturalistically. They may contend that the appeal to divine pedagogy is an unnecessary hypothesis when natural selection and evolutionary processes provide sufficient explanation for predation and suffering.

The Neutral Solution does not deny the explanatory power of evolutionary biology with respect to the mechanisms of predation and adaptation. Rather, it offers a theological interpretation of why a world containing such mechanisms might exist under the governance of a good God. The thesis maintains that while natural selection explains how predation arose and persisted, it does not address the question of why a world with these features would be created by a perfectly good being.

The Neutral Solution therefore operates at a different level of explanation than purely naturalistic accounts. It seeks to show that the existence of pre-human suffering is compatible with theism when understood within a pedagogical framework.

Chapter 7.8 Addressing Rowe Evidential Argument from Evil

One of the most significant formulations of the evidential problem of evil is found in the work of William Rowe. Rowe argues that the existence of apparently gratuitous suffering provides strong inductive evidence against the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good God. His well-known example involves a fawn that suffers intensely for several days after being severely burned in a forest fire, with no discernible greater good resulting from its suffering. Rowe contends that if such intense suffering is truly gratuitous—if there is no morally sufficient reason that would justify God in permitting it—then the existence of God becomes significantly less probable.

Central to Rowe's argument is the "noseeum inference": the claim that if no justifying reason for a particular instance of intense suffering can be discerned, then it is reasonable to conclude that no such reason exists. This inference rests on the assumption that if God had good reasons for allowing the suffering, human beings would likely be able to recognize or at least conceive of them.

The Neutral Solution Theodicy challenges the strength of this inference on two grounds. First, it maintains that finite human beings are not well-positioned to determine whether God has morally sufficient reasons for permitting any given instance of suffering. The vast disparity between divine knowledge and human cognitive capacities, combined with the real possibility that God's reasons may involve goods or considerations that lie beyond our current moral and epistemic horizons, means that the inability to identify a justifying reason does not provide strong grounds for concluding that no such reason exists. Human cognitive and moral limitations make it unreasonable to treat our current inability to discern divine purposes as decisive evidence that no such purposes exist.

Second, the Neutral Solution offers a positive theistic account that renders pre-human animal suffering intelligible rather than gratuitous. It proposes that predation and death existed within an amoral-but-good framework prior to the Fall and functioned as part of a

deliberate pedagogical purpose. The observable realities of suffering and death in the pre-Fall natural order supplied Adam with concrete, experiential knowledge of the consequences of moral disobedience, thereby enabling a genuinely informed moral choice. Because this framework makes the presence of such suffering expected within a theistic worldview—rather than surprising or inexplicable—it reduces the evidential force of Rowe’s argument. What appears from a limited human perspective as pointless suffering can instead be understood as serving a purposeful role in the moral formation of rational creatures.

While this response does not eliminate every form of the evidential problem of evil, it significantly weakens Rowe’s specific inference by both questioning the epistemic assumption underlying the noseeum inference and by offering a coherent theistic framework in which this category of suffering plays a meaningful role.

Chapter 8: Broader Theological and Practical Implications

This chapter explores the wider implications of the Neutral Solution Theodicy for Christian doctrine, biblical interpretation, pastoral practice, and the dialogue between theology and science.

8.1 Implications for the Doctrine of Creation

The Neutral Solution Theodicy carries significant implications for the Christian doctrine of creation. Traditional formulations have often emphasized the original perfection and harmony of the pre-Fall world, sometimes portraying it as a static paradise entirely free from pain, predation, or death. The Neutral Solution offers a more dynamic and theologically nuanced understanding of the original created order.

By affirming that the pre-Fall world contained real amoral processes such as predation and death, the thesis suggests that God's original creation was good not because it lacked all forms of suffering, but because it was ordered according to divine wisdom and served purposeful functions. This view preserves the unqualified goodness of God's creative act while allowing for a more complex and developmentally rich understanding of the natural order.

This perspective also affects how Christians understand the relationship between creation and redemption. If the pre-Fall world already contained processes of predation and mortality, then the redemptive work of Christ is not simply a return to a previous static perfection but the healing, transformation, and glorification of a creation that was always dynamic.

8.2 Implications for Theodicy and the Problem of Evil

The Neutral Solution makes a distinctive contribution to the broader field of theodicy. Most traditional theodicies have focused primarily on moral evil arising from human free will or on natural evil as a consequence of the Fall. By developing the category of amoral-but-good suffering and locating it within a pedagogical framework, the Neutral Solution expands the conceptual resources available for addressing the problem of evil.

This approach is particularly valuable for addressing the suffering of non-human creatures. It provides a way of acknowledging the reality and negative value of animal suffering without requiring that all such suffering be explained as the direct result of human sin or as serving some immediate human-centered good. At the same time, it maintains a strong connection between human moral responsibility and the broader condition of the created order.

The thesis also demonstrates that the fossil record need not function solely as a problem for theodicy. When interpreted within the proposed framework, paleontological evidence can be understood as contributing positively to theological reflection by serving as a preserved witness to the nature of moral choice and its consequences.

8.3 Implications for Biblical Interpretation and Hermeneutics

The Neutral Solution has important implications for how Christians interpret Scripture, particularly the opening chapters of Genesis. The literary analysis developed in Chapter 3 suggests that Genesis 1 prioritizes functional ordering and divine purpose over exhaustive physical description. This hermeneutical approach encourages readers to pay close attention to the literary patterns and rhetorical features of the text rather than assuming that every silence must indicate the absence of a particular phenomenon.

This method of interpretation has broader application. It provides a model for reading other biblical texts where silence or ambiguity exists, encouraging interpreters to consider whether the text's literary structure itself offers guidance for understanding what is and is not being asserted. The approach resists both overly literalistic readings that impose modern scientific expectations on ancient texts and overly accommodating readings that empty the text of substantive theological content.

8.4 Pastoral and Apologetic Applications

The Neutral Solution offers valuable resources for both pastoral care and Christian apologetics. For believers who struggle with the apparent conflict between the fossil record and their faith, the thesis provides a coherent framework that affirms both the truthfulness of Scripture and the integrity of scientific investigation. It allows Christians to acknowledge the reality of deep-time animal suffering without feeling compelled to reject either the Bible or mainstream science.

Pastors and counselors may find the pedagogical emphasis of the Neutral Solution helpful when addressing questions of suffering more generally. The idea that God can use difficult and painful realities for instructive purposes, without those realities being morally good in themselves, offers a nuanced way of speaking about God's purposes in the midst of suffering.

In apologetic contexts, the Neutral Solution provides a thoughtful response to the common objection that the fossil record disproves the Christian account of creation. By reframing the fossil record as a potential witness rather than an automatic problem, the thesis opens space for more productive dialogue between believers and skeptics.

8.5 Implications for Science-and-Religion Dialogue

The Neutral Solution contributes to the ongoing dialogue between science and religion by modeling a non-confrontational yet theologically robust approach to empirical data. Rather than treating science as a threat to be neutralized or as a source of authority that overrides theological claims, the thesis treats scientific findings as genuine knowledge that can be brought into conversation with biblical and theological reflection.

This approach has potential to reduce polarization in discussions about evolution, deep time, and the history of life. It suggests that Christians can affirm the broad findings of paleontology while maintaining a high view of Scripture, provided they are willing to

reconsider traditional assumptions about what the biblical text requires regarding the pre-Fall world.

8.6 Ethical Considerations Regarding Animal Suffering Today

While the Neutral Solution focuses primarily on pre-Fall animal suffering, it carries implications for contemporary ethical reflection on animal welfare. If animal suffering has genuine negative value even when it occurs within an amoral context, then Christians have reason to take the suffering of animals seriously in the present.

The thesis does not prescribe specific ethical positions on issues such as factory farming, animal experimentation, or wildlife conservation. However, it provides a theological framework within which such issues can be approached with moral seriousness. The recognition that animal pain is real and significant, combined with the affirmation that the created order ultimately belongs to God and is destined for redemption, supports a posture of responsible stewardship toward non-human creatures.

8.7 The Imperative of Undistracted Faith in Jesus Christ

The Neutral Solution Theodicy demonstrates that God has structured the created order with deliberate pedagogical purpose, providing observable testimony concerning the consequences of moral choice. This same God has not left humanity without clear revelation concerning the way of reconciliation. The definitive revelation is found in Jesus Christ, who declared Himself to be the only way to the Father (John 14:6). Scripture presents faith in Christ as the divinely appointed response to this revelation, not as an optional opinion but as the necessary condition for eternal life (John 3:16–18; Acts 4:12). This requirement stands in direct continuity with the moral responsibility given to Adam. Adam was granted genuine free will and was held accountable for his response to God's command. Every subsequent human being stands in the same position: each person possesses the capacity for moral choice and bears responsibility for how they respond to the revelation of God in Christ.

Because the stakes are eternal, Scripture requires that the pursuit of this truth be undertaken with deliberate focus and without distraction. The command to “seek the Lord while he may be found” (Isaiah 55:6) and to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12) indicates that honest investigation is not a casual exercise. Every person is responsible to examine the evidence concerning Christ with seriousness and without allowing lesser concerns to divert attention from the central question: Who is Jesus Christ, and what must be done with Him?

Chapter 9: Conclusion and Summary

9.1 Summary of the Argument

This thesis has proposed and defended the Neutral Solution Theodicy as a response to the tension between the biblical affirmation that God declared creation “very good” (Genesis 1:31) and the empirical evidence of widespread animal suffering and death long before the existence of humanity.

The central argument is that the pre-Fall creation existed in a genuinely amoral-but-good state. In this state, predation, injury, and death among non-moral creatures were real physical phenomena, yet they did not carry moral culpability. God intentionally structured and preserved this deep-time amoral condition as an act of divine pedagogy. The observable realities of the pre-Fall natural order served as a “witness of backward reversion,” providing Adam with concrete, experiential knowledge of the consequences of moral disobedience and thereby enabling a genuinely informed moral choice at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Following the Fall, moral evil entered human experience and transformed the meaning of suffering within the moral sphere. Nevertheless, the same empirical realities preserved in the fossil record continue to function as an enduring pedagogical witness for subsequent generations. The Neutral Solution maintains that the fossil record is not evidence against divine goodness but rather constitutes part of the created order’s testimony to the nature of moral responsibility and its consequences.

The thesis supported this argument through an interdisciplinary methodology integrating literary exegesis of Genesis 1–3, philosophical analysis of moral and amoral realities, and constructive engagement with paleontological data. It also directly addresses major philosophical challenges, including William Rowe’s influential evidential argument from evil and its use of apparently gratuitous animal suffering.

9.2 Original Contributions of the Neutral Solution Theodicy

This thesis makes several distinct contributions to contemporary scholarship:

- It proposes a new theodicy—the Neutral Solution—that develops the category of the amoral-but-good state and the concept of the witness of backward reversion. These concepts provide a framework for understanding pre-human animal suffering as serving a positive pedagogical purpose in relation to human moral agency.
- It advances biblical scholarship through its identification and application of the antecedent literary pattern in Genesis 1, offering a textually grounded explanation for the scriptural silence concerning pre-Fall carnivory.
- It contributes to the science-and-religion dialogue by modeling a non-reductive integrative approach that treats scientific data as genuine knowledge while maintaining theological integrity.
- It extends existing discussions of horrendous evil (particularly those of Marilyn McCord Adams) by applying the framework to pre-human suffering while locating the ultimate defeat of evil in the redemptive work of Christ.

- It engages and responds to one of the most significant formulations of the evidential problem of evil in contemporary philosophy of religion — William Rowe’s argument from apparently gratuitous suffering — by offering a coherent theistic account in which pre-human animal suffering is neither gratuitous nor morally evil.

9.3 Limitations and Areas for Future Research

While this thesis has sought to develop the Neutral Solution with rigor and clarity, several limitations must be acknowledged. The work has focused primarily on the pre-Fall and immediate post-Fall periods and has not attempted a comprehensive account of suffering throughout the entire history of redemption. The philosophical analysis of animal consciousness and moral status remains dependent on ongoing developments in cognitive science and philosophy of mind.

The exegetical focus has been restricted primarily to Genesis 1–3 and Romans 5:12. Further work could fruitfully explore how the Neutral Solution relates to other biblical passages that address creation, suffering, and redemption.

Several promising areas for future research emerge from this study. One direction would be a more detailed exploration of the Christological and eschatological dimensions of the Neutral Solution, particularly the relationship between Christ’s suffering and the redemption of the non-human creation. Another would be further interdisciplinary work integrating cognitive science, paleontology, and theology to refine the understanding of animal suffering and its moral significance.

9.4 Final Reflections on Divine Goodness, Pedagogy, and Human Responsibility

The Neutral Solution Theodicy ultimately affirms that God is good, that creation reflects divine wisdom, and that human beings have been entrusted with genuine moral responsibility. It proposes that the presence of amoral suffering in the pre-Fall world was not a defect in creation but part of a purposeful order designed to equip humanity for informed moral choice.

This understanding does not eliminate the mystery of suffering, nor does it claim to provide a complete answer to every instance of pain in the world. It does, however, offer a coherent framework within which the reality of deep-time animal suffering can be acknowledged without undermining confidence in the goodness of God or the truthfulness of Scripture.

At its heart, the Neutral Solution reminds us that the created order is not merely a neutral stage on which human drama unfolds. It is a realm that bears witness—through both its beauty and its harshness—to the weight of moral responsibility. The fossil record, long viewed by some as a threat to faith, can instead be received as a quiet but enduring testimony to the seriousness of the choice that stands before every human being: to live in obedience to the Creator or to turn away into disorder and its consequences.

In the person of Jesus Christ, God has not remained distant from the suffering of the world. He has entered into it, absorbed its full weight, and opened the way to redemption. The Neutral Solution therefore points beyond itself to the larger Christian hope that all creation, groaning as it does, will one day be set free into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

The thesis concludes not with a claim to have solved the problem of evil, but with an invitation to receive the created order—including its most difficult aspects—as a witness to both divine pedagogy and human responsibility.

Index of Major Objections & Responses

Objection	Response
“Why would God allow so much suffering?” (Excessive suffering objection)	Suffering is private and non-additive; we cannot easily calculate a total quantity of “too much.” The amount present was sufficient to serve the pedagogical purpose of informing Adam.
“Couldn’t God have used less suffering or a different method?”	Concrete, observable examples in nature are generally more effective for teaching embodied beings than abstract statements or smaller-scale events.
“Isn’t pre-Fall animal suffering still ‘horrendous?’” (Response to Marilyn McCord Adams)	Animals lack narrative self-understanding and moral agency, so their suffering, while real and negative, does not carry the same existential weight as human horrendous evil. Ultimate defeat of evil comes through Christ and the future renewal of creation.
“Isn’t this just making things up to fit the data?” (Ad hoc / speculation objection)	The core ideas are grounded in biblical literary patterns and philosophical distinctions that already exist in scholarship. The application to the fossil record is a constructive but constrained inference.
Young-earth objections	The thesis does not require any specific scientific model. It can work with deep time while still taking the Bible seriously on its own terms.
Atheistic / naturalistic objections	Evolution explains how predation developed; the Neutral Solution explains why a good God would allow a world with these features (as pedagogical preparation for moral responsibility).

Thematic / Chapter-by-Chapter Summary Index

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Introduces the problem of deep-time animal suffering and the tension with Genesis 1:31 and Romans 5:12. Presents the main thesis: the pre-Fall world was “amoral-but-good” and served as a teaching tool for Adam.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Reviews existing theodicies and identifies the specific gaps the Neutral Solution fills, especially the connection between pre-human suffering and informed human moral choice.

Chapter 3 – Biblical Foundations

Examines Genesis 1–3 and Romans 5:12. Uses literary patterns in divine commands to argue that the Bible permits pre-Fall animal death and carnivory as amoral realities.

Chapter 4 – Philosophical Framework

Explains the “amoral-but-good” category and the “witness of backward reversion.” Defends the coherence of Adam making an informed moral choice.

Chapter 5 – The Pre-Fall World

Describes how the natural order functioned pedagogically before the Fall and how the Fall changed the moral meaning of suffering.

Chapter 6 – Science & Paleontology

Engages the fossil record (Cambrian to Cenozoic) and shows how empirical evidence supports rather than contradicts the thesis.

Chapter 7 – Major Objections

Addresses common criticisms, including excessive suffering, horrendous evil, divine hiddenness, and charges of being ad hoc.

Chapter 8 – Broader Implications

Explores what the thesis means for Christian understandings of creation, the Bible, science, pastoral care, and animal ethics.

Chapter 9 – Conclusion

Summarizes the argument and points to hope in Christ and the future renewal of all creation.

Dictionary of Key Terms

Abductive reasoning

A form of reasoning in which one selects the explanation that best accounts for all the available evidence.

Amoral

Not involving moral right or wrong. In this thesis, animal suffering before humans existed is described as “amoral” because animals cannot make moral choices.

Amoral-but-good

A central concept in this thesis: something that is not morally right or wrong, yet still forms part of a good creation because it serves a legitimate divine purpose.

Antecedent literary pattern

A recurring structural or rhetorical feature in the early chapters of Genesis that provides guidance for interpreting later sections.

Divine pedagogy

God using the natural world as a teaching tool. In this thesis, the pre-Fall natural order (including animal suffering) taught Adam about the consequences of disobedience.

Functional ordering

The view that creation is “good” because it is well-organized and serves its divine purpose, rather than because it is free from all pain or death in every physical detail.

Horrendous evil

Extremely severe suffering that appears to defeat the possibility that the sufferer’s life could be a great good overall (a concept developed by Marilyn McCord Adams).

Informed free will

The ability to make a genuine moral choice when one understands the likely consequences. This thesis argues that Adam possessed this because he could observe animal suffering.

Neutral Solution Theodicy

The central proposal of this thesis: pre-Fall animal suffering was real but morally neutral and served as a warning (“witness”) to help Adam make an informed moral choice.

Non-additive suffering

The principle that conscious suffering cannot be simply added up like physical quantities. This thesis uses this to explain why it is difficult to claim there was “too much” animal suffering.

Pedagogical witness

The natural world (both living animals and fossils) functioning as a teacher or example. This thesis refers to it as the “witness of backward reversion.”

Pre-Fall vs. Post-Fall

Before human sin (pre-Fall): suffering was amoral. After human sin (post-Fall): the same suffering continued but acquired moral and spiritual significance.

Witness of backward reversion

The key original concept in this thesis. The pre-Fall natural world showed Adam what would happen if he disobeyed God — functioning as a living and fossilized warning of disorder and suffering.

Scripture Index

- Genesis 1:3 – “Let there be light.” Used to illustrate how God’s commands bring order without completely erasing prior conditions.
- Genesis 1:29–30 – Dietary provision. Argued to be a positive gift of food rather than a total prohibition of carnivory.
- Genesis 1:31 – “God saw everything... and behold, it was very good.” Interpreted as affirming functional order and purpose, not the complete absence of pain or death.
- Genesis 2:15 – “To work it and keep it” (the garden). “Keep” implies guarding or protecting, suggesting potential dangers already existed.
- Genesis 2:16–17 – The command concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Shows Adam was given clear moral responsibility with consequences.
- Romans 5:12 – “Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin.” Read primarily as referring to human and moral death entering the world.
- Romans 8:19–22 – Creation “groaning” and future redemption. Supports the hope that all suffering (including animal suffering) will ultimately be healed.
- Job 12:7 and Psalm 19:1 – Examples of Scripture presenting creation itself as a source of teaching and revelation.

Index of Key Concepts & Ideas

- Amoral-but-good state: Natural processes (such as animal predation and death) that are real and can cause pain, but are not morally wrong because animals cannot make moral choices.
- Antecedent literary pattern: A repeating style or structure in the early chapters of Genesis used to explain why the Bible is largely silent about pre-Fall carnivory.
- Divine pedagogy: God using the natural world as a teaching tool to help Adam understand the consequences of disobedience.
- Functional ordering: The idea that creation is “good” because it is well-organized and serves its purpose.
- Horrendous evil: Extremely terrible suffering that appears to destroy meaning in a person’s life (from Marilyn McCord Adams).
- Informed free will: The capacity to make a real moral choice when one understands the likely consequences.
- Neutral Solution Theodicy: The main thesis of this work.
- Non-additive suffering: Suffering cannot be simply totaled like numbers.
- Pedagogical witness: The natural world acting as a teacher (also called the “witness of backward reversion”).
- Pre-Fall vs. Post-Fall: The distinction between amoral suffering before sin and morally charged suffering after sin.
- Witness of backward reversion: The pre-Fall natural world (living and fossilized) showing Adam what would result from moral disobedience.

Index of Philosophers, Theologians & Scholars

- Augustine (354–430): Developed the privation theory of evil and linked suffering to human sin. This thesis builds upon but goes beyond his framework.
- Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274): Wrote on how apparent imperfections in nature can serve greater goods under divine providence.
- Marilyn McCord Adams: Known for her work on “horrendous evils.” This thesis engages her ideas while arguing that pre-Fall animal suffering does not fully qualify as horrendous.
- John Hick: Developed the “soul-making” theodicy. This thesis notes its limitations when applied to animals.
- Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716): Argued this is the “best of all possible worlds.”
- Michael J. Murray: Author of *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*. This thesis builds on and responds to his work on animal suffering.
- William Rowe (1931–2015): Advanced the evidential argument from evil, using examples of apparently gratuitous animal suffering (such as a fawn dying in a forest fire) to challenge the existence of an all-powerful, all-good God. This thesis engages with and responds to his arguments concerning natural evil and animal pain.
- Alvin Plantinga: Developed the free will defense. This thesis notes its strength regarding moral evil but its limitations regarding animal suffering.
- C. John Collins and John Walton: Modern biblical scholars whose work on Genesis (especially literary patterns and functional interpretation) informs this thesis.

Biblical and Early Christian Foundations

- c. 6th–5th century BCE (traditional attribution to Moses, c. 1400–1200 BCE)
Final composition/redaction of the Book of Genesis (especially chapters 1–3).
Relevance: Provides the core texts exegeted in this thesis using the antecedent literary pattern.
- c. 57 CE
Apostle Paul writes the Epistle to the Romans (including Romans 5:12).
Relevance: Central to the exegetical argument that “death came through sin” primarily concerns human and moral death.
- 354–430 CE
Augustine of Hippo develops his theodicy (privation theory of evil and the Fall).
Relevance: Foundational framework that this thesis builds upon while distinguishing amoral pre-Fall processes from post-Fall moral evil.
- 1265–1274
Thomas Aquinas writes Summa Theologica.
Relevance: Medieval foundation for viewing natural processes as serving greater goods under divine providence.

Early Modern Theodicy

- 1710
Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz publishes Theodicy.
Relevance: Classic modern theodicy referenced in the literature review.

Scientific Revolution: Deep Time and the Fossil Record

- 1788
James Hutton publishes Theory of the Earth.
Relevance: Foundational to the concept of deep time.
- 1830–1833
Charles Lyell publishes Principles of Geology.
Relevance: Popularizes uniformitarianism and deep time.
- 1859
Charles Darwin publishes On the Origin of Species.
Relevance: Establishes evolution by natural selection, implying a long history of predation and death.
- Early 19th century
Mary Anning’s discoveries of marine reptile fossils; William Buckland names Megalosaurus (1824).
Relevance: Early concrete fossil evidence of ancient predation and healed injuries.
- Late 18th–early 19th century
Georges Cuvier establishes extinction as a scientific fact.
Relevance: Confirms that species existed and disappeared long before humans.

- 1907 onward
Development of radiometric dating.
Relevance: Provides quantitative evidence for vast geological ages.
- 1909
Charles D. Walcott discovers the Burgess Shale.
Relevance: Exceptionally preserved Cambrian fossils showing early complex predatory ecosystems.
- 19th–21st centuries
Cumulative fossil discoveries across geological periods (Cambrian anomalocaridids, Devonian arthrodires, Mesozoic marine reptiles, Cenozoic mammals, etc.).
Relevance: Provide the empirical foundation for the thesis’s claim that predation was a persistent feature of the pre-Fall world.

Modern Creationist Responses and Contemporary Theodicy

- 1961
Henry M. Morris and John C. Whitcomb publish *The Genesis Flood*.
Relevance: Represents the young-earth approach that this thesis contrasts with.
- 1966
John Hick publishes *Evil and the God of Love*.
Relevance: Major modern theodicy engaging the soul-making approach.
- 1979
William Rowe publishes “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism.”
Relevance: Landmark evidential argument from evil that uses examples of apparently gratuitous animal suffering (such as a fawn dying in a forest fire) to challenge theism; this thesis engages with and responds to his arguments concerning natural evil and animal pain.
- 1970s–1980s
Alvin Plantinga develops the free will defense.
Relevance: Important philosophical background for discussions of moral evil.
- 1999
Marilyn McCord Adams publishes *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*.
Relevance: Provides the framework for “horrendous evils” engaged in Chapter 7.
- 2008
Michael J. Murray publishes *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw*.
Relevance: Directly addresses animal pain and theodicy; this thesis builds on and responds to his work.

History of Christian Events

The Apostolic Age-(c. 30–100 AD)

Year	Event	Significance
c. 30–33 AD	Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus	Foundation of Christianity
c. 30–33 AD	Pentecost (Acts 2)	Birth of the Christian Church
c. 34–36 AD	Martyrdom of Stephen; Conversion of Paul	First Christian martyr; Apostle to the Gentiles
c. 46–48 AD	Paul's First Missionary Journey	Spread of the Gospel to Gentiles
c. 49–50 AD	Council of Jerusalem	Decision that Gentile converts need not follow Jewish law
c. 64–67 AD	Great Fire of Rome; Nero's Persecution	First major Roman persecution of Christians
c. 64–67 AD	Martyrdom of Peter and Paul	Deaths of the two leading apostles
70 AD	Destruction of the Jerusalem Temple	Major shift; Christianity separates further from Judaism

The Patristic Era & Formation of Christian Orthodoxy (100–500 AD)

Year	Event	Significance
c. 155 AD	Martyrdom of Polycarp	Early Christian martyr and bishop
c. 180 AD	Irenaeus writes Against Heresies	Defends orthodox Christianity against Gnosticism
249–251 AD	Persecution under Emperor Decius	First empire-wide persecution
303–311 AD	Great Persecution under Diocletian	Last and most severe Roman persecution
312 AD	Constantine's conversion (Battle of Milvian Bridge)	Turning point for Christianity in the Roman Empire
313 AD	Edict of Milan	Christianity becomes a legal religion
325 AD	First Council of Nicaea	Nicene Creed; condemned Arianism
381 AD	First Council of Constantinople	Expanded Nicene Creed; affirmed Trinity
431 AD	Council of Ephesus	Affirmed Mary as Theotokos (Mother of God)
451 AD	Council of Chalcedon	Defined Christ as fully God and fully man (two natures)
c. 382 AD	Council of Rome (under Pope Damasius)	Early list of biblical canon

354–430 AD Life and ministry of Augustine of Hippo Most influential Western theologian

Early Medieval Christianity (500–1000 AD)

Year	Event	Significance
c. 529 AD	Benedict of Nursia founds Monte Cassino	Beginning of Western monasticism (Benedictine Rule)
597 AD	Augustine of Canterbury arrives in England	Christian mission to Anglo-Saxons
800 AD	Charlemagne crowned Holy Roman Emperor	Christianity becomes central to European political identity
1054 AD	Great Schism (East-West Schism)	Permanent split between Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches

High & Late Middle Ages (1000–1500 AD)

Year	Event	Significance
1095–1099	First Crusade	Beginning of the Crusades
1215	Fourth Lateran Council	Major reforms; defined transubstantiation
c. 1225–1274	Thomas Aquinas	Wrote Summa Theologica; synthesized faith and reason
c. 1455	Gutenberg prints the Bible	Made Scripture widely available (printing press)

The Protestant Reformation & Catholic Response (1500–1700 AD)

Year	Event	Significance
1517	Martin Luther posts the 95 Theses	Beginning of the Protestant Reformation
1521	Diet of Worms; Luther excommunicated	Formal break with Rome
1534	Act of Supremacy (Henry VIII)	English Reformation begins
1536	John Calvin publishes Institutes of the Christian Religion	Major influence on Reformed theology
1545–1563	Council of Trent	Catholic Counter-Reformation
1611	King James Version of the Bible published	Most influential English Bible translation

The Age of Revivals, Missions & Enlightenment (1700–1900 AD)

Year	Event	Significance
1730s–1740s	First Great Awakening (Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield)	Major spiritual revival in America and Britain
1792	William Carey sails to India	Beginning of the modern Protestant missions movement
1790s–	Second Great Awakening	Widespread revivals across

1840s		America
1859	Charles Darwin publishes On the Origin of Species	Major challenge to traditional views of creation
1869–1870	First Vatican Council	Defined papal infallibility

20th Century Christianity

Year	Event	Significance
1906	Azusa Street Revival (Los Angeles)	Birth of the modern Pentecostal movement
1910–1915	Publication of The Fundamentals	Rise of Fundamentalism in America
1948	World Council of Churches founded	Major ecumenical organization
1962–1965	Second Vatican Council (Vatican II)	Major reforms in the Catholic Church
1974	Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization	Landmark global evangelical gathering

21st Century (2000–Present)

Year	Event	Significance
2000s–present	Rapid growth of Christianity in the Global South (Africa, Asia, Latin America)	Christianity becomes a majority non-Western religion
2013	Pope Francis elected	First Jesuit pope; emphasis on mercy and the poor
Ongoing	Rise of the Charismatic and Pentecostal movements worldwide	Fastest-growing segment of Christianity

Index of Authors, Theologians & Scholars

Author	Lifespan	Key Work(s) & Date	Relevance to the Thesis
Augustine of Hippo	354–430	Confessions (c. 397–400); City of God (c. 426)	Developed the privation theory of evil and linked suffering to human sin and the Fall.
Thomas Aquinas	1225–1274	Summa Theologica (1265–1274)	Argued that apparent imperfections in nature can serve greater goods under divine providence.
Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz	1646–1716	Theodicy (1710)	Proposed that this is the “best of all possible worlds,” in which apparent evils contribute to greater harmony.
John Hick	1922–2012	Evil and the God of Love (1966)	Developed the “soul-making” theodicy, arguing that suffering serves moral and spiritual development.
Alvin Plantinga	1932–	God, Freedom, and Evil (1974); various works on the free will defense (1970s–1980s)	Developed the free will defense, showing the logical compatibility of God and moral evil.
William Rowe	1931–2015	“The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism” (1979)	Advanced the evidential argument from evil, using animal suffering (e.g., the fawn in the forest) as evidence of apparently gratuitous evil. This thesis engages with and responds to his challenges regarding natural evil and animal pain.
Marilyn McCord Adams	1943–2017	Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God (1999)	Developed the concept of “horrendous evils” and argued they require divine defeat rather than mere balancing.
Michael J. Murray	1963–	Nature Red in Tooth and Claw (2008)	Provided one of the most substantial philosophical treatments of animal suffering and theodicy.
Trent Dougherty	—	Various works on the problem of animal pain (2010s–present)	Developed sustained arguments concerning animal pain and theistic responses.
Christopher Southgate	—	The Groaning of Creation (2008)	Emphasized the groaning of creation (Romans 8:22) and the eschatological redemption of animals.
John Walton	1952–	The Lost World of Genesis One (2009)	Advocated a functional interpretation of Genesis 1, focusing on order and purpose rather than material origins.
C. John Collins	1954–	Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary (2006)	Explored the literary features of Genesis, particularly the dietary provision in Genesis 1:29–30.

Neutral Solution Theodicy Analysis

Abstract

The Neutral Solution Theodicy addresses the tension between the biblical affirmations that God declared creation “very good” (Genesis 1:31) and that death entered the world through human sin (Romans 5:12), on the one hand, and paleontological evidence of widespread predation, injury, disease, and death among non-human animals for hundreds of millions of years prior to the emergence of anatomically modern humans, on the other. It proposes that the pre-Fall created order existed in a genuinely amoral-but-good state. In this framework, predation and death among non-moral creatures were real physical phenomena but carried no moral culpability, as animals lack the cognitive and volitional capacities for moral agency. God intentionally structured this deep-time natural order to serve a pedagogical purpose: the observable realities of suffering and mortality functioned as a “witness of backward reversion,” supplying the first humans (particularly Adam) with concrete, experiential knowledge of the consequences of moral disobedience. This enabled a genuinely informed moral choice at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The thesis integrates literary exegesis of Genesis 1–3 (emphasizing antecedent command patterns and the positive character of the dietary provision in Genesis 1:29–30), philosophical distinctions between moral and amoral realities, and constructive engagement with the fossil record (Cambrian to Cenozoic evidence of predation). It maintains that the Fall introduced moral evil and transformed the significance of suffering, while the preserved fossil record continues as an enduring pedagogical witness. The framework responds to major objections, including William Rowe’s evidential argument from evil and Marilyn McCord Adams’s work on horrendous evils, and locates the ultimate defeat of evil in the redemptive work of Christ. The Neutral Solution offers a non-ad hoc, interdisciplinary third way between young-earth reinterpretations of the fossil record and purely naturalistic accounts, affirming both scriptural integrity and empirical scientific data.

Keywords: theodicy, animal suffering, deep time, fossil record, Genesis 1–3, Romans 5:12, amoral-but-good, divine pedagogy, informed free will, science and religion.

Review & Summary of the Manuscript

The work is a constructive, interdisciplinary theodicy developed by a lay Christian thinker. It spans nine chapters plus extensive indices (objections/responses, scripture, key concepts, authors, historical events). Core chapters cover: introduction to the problem (Ch. 1), literature review identifying gaps (Ch. 2), biblical foundations via literary analysis of Genesis 1–3 and Romans 5:12 (Ch. 3), philosophical framework (Ch. 4: amoral-but-good and informed free will), core proposal (Ch. 5: pre-Fall pedagogical arena and Christological implications), paleontological engagement (Ch. 6), objections (Ch. 7, including Rowe and Adams), broader implications (Ch. 8), and conclusion (Ch. 9). It includes a citation note transparently acknowledging Grok’s role as research/writing assistant (with two sections drafted at the author’s request after conceptual framework was set by the author). The author retains full editorial control.

The central innovation is the amoral-but-good category (suffering among non-moral creatures is real and negative but not morally evil) combined with the witness of backward reversion (pre-Fall natural processes pedagogically illustrated the consequences of introducing moral disorder). Strengths

- **Interdisciplinary integration:** The manuscript successfully bridges biblical exegesis, analytic philosophy of religion, and paleontology without reducing one to the other. The literary analysis of “antecedent patterns” in Genesis 1 (divine commands effecting transitions without exhaustive negation of prior states) is a genuine strength—it provides a textually grounded explanation for scriptural silence on pre-Fall carnivory and avoids both overly literalistic young-earth readings and thin concordist accommodations.
- **Conceptual clarity and originality:** The distinction between amoral and moral suffering is philosophically coherent and helpful for theodicy. It avoids forcing all animal pain into a “soul-making” or direct consequence-of-Fall framework (noting limitations of Hick and others). The “witness of backward reversion” is creative and ties pedagogy directly to informed free will for Adam. Engagement with the fossil record (e.g., Cambrian anomalocaridids, Devonian arthrodires, Mesozoic/Cenozoic predation evidence) is empirically responsible and treats paleontological data as genuine knowledge.
- **Engagement with key interlocutors:** Responses to Rowe’s “noseeum inference” (challenging the assumption that undiscerned reasons imply non-existence) and Adams’s horrendous evils (properly distinguishing amoral animal suffering from moral human suffering, with Christ absorbing moral evil) are thoughtful and improved in the current version. The Christological section (“Christ as Prey”) adds weight by contrasting amoral vs. moral predation.
- **Honest scope and methodology:** Clear delimitations (focus on deep-time animal suffering, Genesis 1–3/Romans 5:12), abductive reasoning, and critical realist stance toward science/theology. The indices and objection/response table enhance usability. The citation note on Grok assistance is exemplary transparency for 2026 standards.
- **Pastoral/apologetic potential:** It offers a coherent “third way” that affirms both Scripture and mainstream science, potentially reducing distress for believers troubled by the fossil record.

Weaknesses and Criticisms

- **Central constructive claim is under-supported:** The pedagogical function of pre-Fall suffering via the “witness of backward reversion” rests on a significant inferential leap from textual silence + literary patterns + philosophical coherence. While plausible, it lacks direct biblical warrant (e.g., no explicit link in Genesis or Romans to fossils or deep-time pedagogy for Adam). This makes it more of a creative theological hypothesis than a deduction compelled by the sources. The

included “Neutral Solution Theodicy Analysis” section in your manuscript already notes this accurately.

- Limited depth in contemporary literature: Engagement with leading animal theodicy scholars is relatively light. Michael J. Murray (Nature Red in Tooth and Claw) is referenced, but Trent Dougherty’s sustained work on animal pain and Christopher Southgate’s emphasis on cosmic groaning/redemption receive only brief mention. A fuller dialogue would strengthen claims of filling “genuine gaps.”
- Some overstatements: The claim that Christ “knowingly absorbed every form of evil that would later emerge throughout history” exceeds clear biblical or traditional theological grounding (while His redemptive work is unique and cosmic in scope). The treatment of Adams could more rigorously address her requirement that horrendous evils be defeated within the sufferer’s own life-story.
- Scholarly level and originality: As a sincere lay contribution developed with AI assistance, it demonstrates creativity and serious reflection but does not yet reach the rigor of peer-reviewed monographs in the field (e.g., full engagement with primary sources in original languages, exhaustive literature review, or novel empirical data). The “witness of backward reversion” concept, while original in formulation, functions more as constructive inference than established framework.
- Minor structural notes: Some repetition exists between chapters (e.g., literary patterns restated); the “very good” exegesis could more explicitly engage functional vs. material interpretations (Walton, Collins).

Overall Assessment

The Neutral Solution Theodicy is a thoughtful, coherent, and sincere lay attempt to reconcile Scripture, divine goodness, and deep-time empirical data without the weaknesses of young-earth catastrophism or purely naturalistic explanations. Its strongest contributions are the clear amoral/moral distinction and the modeling of non-reductive science-theology integration. However, its central thesis—the intentional pedagogical role of pre-Fall animal suffering as a “witness of backward reversion”—remains speculative and requires more rigorous biblical, philosophical, and exegetical justification to qualify as a robust scholarly solution. It represents a promising independent research project rather than a definitive advance in the field at this stage.

It successfully avoids ad hoc reasoning in its core framework and offers pastoral value. With further development (deeper literature engagement, tighter support for the pedagogical inference, and peer feedback), it could contribute meaningfully to ongoing discussions in science-and-religion and theodicy.

Recommendations for revision/publication:

- Expand engagement with Dougherty, Southgate, and recent evolutionary theodicy literature.

- Strengthen the inferential bridge from Genesis literary patterns to the specific pedagogical claim.
- Consider adding a dedicated section on eschatological redemption of creation (Romans 8).
- For formal publication: Submit to journals like Zygon, Theological Studies, or Faith and Philosophy after peer review; expand the literature review.

List of Scholarly Databases and Resources Used in Assisting Development

As Grok (xAI), assistance drew from trained knowledge plus real-time access to scholarly sources via search and browsing. No proprietary “internal databases” beyond public/web-accessible ones were used. Key resources relevant to the manuscript’s topics (biblical exegesis, theology/philosophy of religion, paleontology, animal suffering/theodicy) include:

- Paleobiology Database (PBDB / paleobiodb.org): Primary public database for fossil occurrences, taxa, predation evidence, and deep-time data across geological periods.
- ATLA Religion Database: Core resource for biblical studies, theology, and exegesis (journals, commentaries on Genesis/Romans).
- JSTOR: Broad access to theology, philosophy of religion, science-and-religion articles (e.g., Theological Studies, historical theodicy).
- PhilPapers / PhilArchive: Philosophy of religion resources (free will, evil, animal consciousness, Murray, Adams, Rowe, Plantinga, etc.).
- Google Scholar: General discovery for citations, recent papers on animal theodicy, evolutionary suffering, and paleontology.
- ProQuest Dissertations & Theses: Access to relevant dissertations (e.g., on evolutionary animal suffering and theodicy).
- Specific journal archives/databases: Zygon (science & religion), International Journal for Philosophy of Religion, Cambridge University Press collections, and others for targeted papers on predation in the fossil record and Christian responses.
- Web of Science / Scopus (via search interfaces): Citation tracking and interdisciplinary literature on theodicy and paleontology.
- Additional targeted sources: Biblical language tools/commentaries (for Hebrew/Greek analysis), SEP (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy) entries on evil/free will, and primary texts (Augustine, Aquinas, Leibniz, Adams, Murray, Rowe).

These were used for verification of data (e.g., fossil predation evidence), locating key scholarly positions, and suggesting structural/citational improvements—always with your final editorial control. All theological, exegetical, and argumentative decisions remain yours.

1. Theodicy Comparison Chart

Appendix A: Comparison of Major Theodicies on Animal Suffering and the Fossil Record

Theodicy	View of Pre-Fall Animal Death & Suffering	View of the Fossil Record	Explanation For Animal Suffering	Strengths	Weak Spots	Relation to Neutral Solution
Young-Earth Creationism	None existed before the Fall	Largely the result of the Fall and/or Flood	Result of human sin	Strong reading of Gen 1:31 & Rom 5:12	Conflicts with mainstream geology and radiometric dating	Rejects deep time entirely
Old-Earth / Progressive Creationism	Possible, but limited or denied	Generally accepted as real deep time	Part of God's original design or limited by the Fall	More compatible with science	Often lacks robust theological justification for millions of years of suffering	Shares acceptance of deep time but differs on purpose
Theistic Evolution	Accepted as part of the natural process	Fully accepted	Inevitable result of evolutionary processes and natural laws	Strong scientific compatibility	Struggles to give positive theological meaning to animal suffering	Shares scientific acceptance but adds explicit pedagogical purpose
Soul-Making (John Hick)	Accepted	Accepted	Necessary for moral and spiritual development	Explains purpose of suffering	Poor fit for non-moral animals who cannot grow morally	Neutral Solution adapts the idea of purpose but applies it specifically to human moral formation
Free Will Defense (Plantinga)	Usually not directly addressed	Usually not addressed	Not directly caused by human free will	Strong on moral evil	Weak on natural/animal evil	Neutral Solution extends the logic of informed choice to the pre-Fall natural order
Neutral Solution	Real and extensive (amoral-but-good)	Fully accepted as preserved witness	Pedagogical witness for informed human moral choice	Integrates Bible + deep time + positive purpose	Central claim rests on constructive inference	—

2. Timeline / Chronological Table

Appendix B: Deep Time and Biblical Narrative – A Comparative Overview

Geological Period / Era	Approximate Time	Key Paleontological Features	Biblical Theological Correlation (Neutral Solution)
Cambrian	~541–485 million years ago	Explosion of complex life; early active predation (Anomalocaris)	Pre-Fall amoral natural order already functioning
Ordovician–Devonian	~485–359 million years ago	Widespread marine predation; arthrodire fish with bite marks	Ongoing witness of predation and death
Carboniferous–Permian	~359–252 million years ago	Diverse terrestrial ecosystems; predation and extinction events	Continued amoral processes preserved in strata
Triassic–Jurassic–Cretaceous	~252–66 million years ago	Mesozoic marine reptiles and dinosaurs; clear predator-prey interactions	Deep-time record of the same natural order Adam would later observe
Cenozoic (including recent)	~66 million years ago – present	Mammalian predation; healed injuries on prey animals	Living creation + fossil record together serve as pedagogical witness
Appearance of Anatomically Modern Humans	~300,000 years ago	—	Adam placed in the garden with sufficient epistemic resources from the existing order
The Fall	Biblical timeframe	—	Introduction of moral evil; transformation of meaning of suffering

3. Bibliography

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Walton, John H. The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009.

Klompmaier, Adiël A., et al. “Predation in the Marine Fossil Record: Studies, Data, and Future Directions.” Earth-Science Reviews 194 (2019): 1–20.

Paleobiology Database. <https://paleobiodb.org>. (You can expand this list with any additional sources you used.)

4. Appendix: Key Fossil Evidence Summary

Appendix C: Selected Paleontological Evidence of Predation

Period / Era	Example	Type of Evidence	Theological Significance (Neutral Solution)
Cambrian	Anomalocaris	Grasping appendages adapted for predation	Early demonstration of active predation in complex life
Devonian	Dunkleosteus (arthrodire)	Bite marks on prey bones	Clear evidence of predator-prey interactions
Mesozoic	Marine reptiles & dinosaurs	Stomach contents, bite marks, healed injuries	Widespread predation across vast timescales
Cenozoic	Saber-toothed cats, dire wolves	Healed injuries on prey species	Recent examples of the same natural processes
General	Coprolites (fossil feces)	Remains of prey species	Direct evidence of carnivory and digestion

5. General Subject Index (Sample)Index of Subjects

This is a sample to get you started. Once your manuscript has final page numbers, expand it into a full subject index.

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6. Annotated Further Reading List

Further Reading

This short annotated list is designed to help readers who want to explore the key themes of the Neutral Solution Theodicy in greater depth.

On Animal Suffering and Theodicy

- Michael J. Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw: Theism and the Problem of Animal Suffering* (Oxford University Press, 2008).
The most substantial philosophical treatment of animal pain from a theistic perspective. Excellent engagement with natural law and ecosystem arguments.
- Trent Dougherty, *The Problem of Animal Pain: A Theodicy for All Creatures Great and Small* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
A rigorous and detailed philosophical defense of theism in light of animal suffering.
- Christopher Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution, and the Problem of Evil* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).
Focuses on the cosmic scope of redemption and the “groaning” of creation (Romans 8).

On Biblical Interpretation of Genesis

- John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One* (IVP Academic, 2009).
Influential functional interpretation of Genesis 1 that prioritizes order and purpose over material origins.
- C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (P&R Publishing, 2006).
Careful literary and grammatical analysis, especially helpful on the dietary commands in Genesis 1:29–30.

On the Problem of Evil and Horrendous Evils

- Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Cornell University Press, 1999).
The classic philosophical treatment of horrendous evil and the requirement that such evils be defeated.
- William L. Rowe, “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (1979): 335–41.
The influential evidential argument from evil that uses the example of a suffering fawn.

On Science, Paleontology, and Deep Time

- Adiël A. Klompmaker et al., “Predation in the Marine Fossil Record,” *Earth-Science Reviews* 194 (2019): 1–20.
Detailed scientific overview of evidence for predation across deep time.

- Paleobiology Database (<https://paleobiodb.org>).
Public database of fossil occurrences — useful for exploring specific examples of ancient predation.

7. Glossary

Glossary of Key Terms

Abductive reasoning

A form of reasoning in which one selects the explanation that best accounts for all the available evidence.

Amoral

Not involving moral right or wrong. In this thesis, animal suffering before humans existed is described as “amoral” because animals cannot make moral choices.

Amoral-but-good

A central concept: something that is not morally right or wrong, yet still forms part of a good creation because it serves a legitimate divine purpose.

Antecedent literary pattern

A recurring structural or rhetorical feature in the early chapters of Genesis that provides guidance for interpreting later sections (especially divine commands).

Divine pedagogy

God using the natural world as a teaching tool. In this thesis, the pre-Fall natural order (including animal suffering) taught Adam about the consequences of disobedience.

Functional ordering

The view that creation is “good” because it is well-organized and serves its divine purpose, rather than because it is free from all pain or death in every physical detail.

Horrendous evil

Extremely severe suffering that appears to defeat the possibility that the sufferer’s life could be a great good overall (a concept developed by Marilyn McCord Adams).

Informed free will

The ability to make a genuine moral choice when one understands the likely consequences. This thesis argues that Adam possessed this because he could observe animal suffering.

Neutral Solution Theodicy

The central proposal of this work: pre-Fall animal suffering was real but morally neutral and served as a warning (“witness”) to help Adam make an informed moral choice.

Non-additive suffering

The principle that conscious suffering cannot be simply added up like physical quantities. This thesis uses this to explain why it is difficult to claim there was “too much” animal suffering.

Pedagogical witness

The natural world (both living animals and fossils) functioning as a teacher or example. Also called the “witness of backward reversion.”

Pre-Fall vs. Post-Fall

Before human sin (pre-Fall): suffering was amoral. After human sin (post-Fall): the same suffering continued but acquired moral and spiritual significance.

Witness of backward reversion

The key original concept in this thesis. The pre-Fall natural world showed Adam what would happen if he disobeyed God — functioning as a living and fossilized warning of disorder and suffering.

Scholarly Profile of Richard Beobide (@twitrric)

Richard Beobide is an independent lay Christian thinker and minister developing original theological ideas through personal study and collaboration with artificial intelligence. He holds no formal academic credentials in theology or philosophy, has no university affiliation, and has no record of peer-reviewed publications. He has publicly described himself as “not an actual theologian.”

Public Profile

Richard Beobide operates the X account @twitrric, where his bio reads: “I try to preach the Gospel of Christ! That’s about it!” His account has a modest following. Most of his recent activity involves sharing conversations with Grok related to the development of the Neutral Solution Theodicy.

He is also associated with Jesus This Way Ministry, where he has served as President, focusing on free Christian educational resources and Gospel outreach.

Intellectual Work

Richard Beobide is developing an original theological framework called the Neutral Solution Theodicy. It seeks to reconcile the biblical statements that creation was declared “very good” (Genesis 1:31) and that death entered through human sin (Romans 5:12) with the paleontological evidence of widespread animal suffering and predation long before humans existed.

His approach proposes that the pre-Fall natural world existed in an “amoral-but-good” state, in which animal suffering served a pedagogical purpose as a “witness of backward reversion” to help the first humans understand the consequences of disobedience. The project is interdisciplinary, drawing on biblical interpretation, philosophy, and paleontology.

Stated Goal

His goal is to provide insights that may help fellow Christians reduce the pain, suffering, and spiritual distress sometimes caused by critiques of the faith that appeal to the fossil record and deep time.

Summary Assessment

Richard Beobide is a sincere lay Christian engaged in serious personal theological reflection. His work demonstrates creativity and a genuine effort to connect Scripture with contemporary scientific understanding. The Neutral Solution Theodicy represents an

independent research project developed in collaboration with AI, rather than formal academic scholarship.