

# LOOKS IN SEARCH OF THE MEANING OF THE HUMAN SUFFERING

## MIRADAS EN BUSCA DEL SENTIDO DEL SUFRIMIENTO HUMANO

### PROCURA O SIGNIFICADO DO SOFRIMENTO HUMANO



Abel Antonio Salazar-García<sup>1\*</sup>

abelantonio.salazar@unmsm.edu.pe

<sup>1</sup>Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, Lima, Perú

\*Correspondence: Abel Antonio Salazar-García Tel: +51 964 783 388 Email: abelantonio.salazar@unmsm.edu.pe

Received: 07.03.22 | Approved: 07.05.22 | Published: 17.05.22

#### ABSTRACT

This text presents the terms pain and suffering that we often use interchangeably in our daily lives and how both involve, trap, disturb the individual. So, to understand the effects of pain and suffering. It is necessary to know the realms that encompass the human being, and how the individual perceives them. Suffering is perceived in an existential reality that affects the individual. When suffering occurs and continues, it leaves aftermaths in its wake in many cases, and what options are presented to us to face the suffering or let ourselves be dragged by this experience. This paper was derived from my thesis on identity in the philosophy of Charles Taylor with his view of modernity in a secular age.

**Keywords:** pain, disease, individual, psychology.

#### RESUMEN

En el presente texto se presentan los términos dolor y sufrimiento que muchas veces los usamos de manera intercambiable en nuestra cotidianidad y cómo ambos envuelven al individuo, lo atrapa y lo perturba. De este modo para entender los efectos del dolor y del sufrimiento se debe conocer las dimensiones que abarcan en la persona humana, y cómo el individuo las percibe. El sufrimiento se concretiza en una realidad existencial que afecta al individuo cuando se presenta y continúa dejando secuelas a su paso en muchos casos, y qué opciones se nos presentan para afrontarlo o dejarnos arrastrar por esta experiencia. Este artículo fue derivado de mi tesis sobre la identidad en la filosofía de Charles Taylor con su mirada de la modernidad en la era secular.

**Palabras clave:** dolor, enfermedad, individuo, psicología.

#### RESUMO

Este texto apresenta os termos dor e sofrimento que frequentemente usamos de forma intercambiável em nosso cotidiano e como ambos envolvem, prendem, perturbam o indivíduo. Portanto, para entender os efeitos da dor e do sofrimento. É necessário conhecer os reinos que envolvem o ser humano e como o indivíduo os percebe. O sofrimento é percebido em uma realidade existencial que afeta o indivíduo. Quando o sofrimento ocorre e continua, ele deixa sequelas em seu rastro em muitos casos, e quais opções nos são apresentadas para enfrentar o sofrimento ou nos deixar arrastar por essa experiência. Este artigo foi derivado de minha tese sobre identidade na filosofia de Charles Taylor com sua visão da modernidade em uma era secular.

**Palavras chaves:** dor, doença, indivíduo, psicologia.

## INTRODUCTION

Why do people suffer? What is the reason for suffering? What is the meaning of suffering?

These are questions that individuals ask themselves in moments of difficult situations in life even the language itself offer words related to suffering. Many of the meanings of these words are confused with each other, for instance, the words suffering, pain, sorrow, grief, and even anguish are commonly used in tough times because they all refer to a situation of discomfort in the individual. Suffering accompanies the human being since the dawn of humankind, and since there people have also sought to alleviate pain, cure or heal the infirmities, allowing the individual to restore his or her health to the original situation; in the same way the feeling of concern to make sense the human suffering starts.

The meaning of human suffering is not always achieved with the sole notion of logical cause-consequence because there are many factors that influence it from the very objectivity of what is measurable and observable to subjectivity; reason why the realms that encompass the human being must be understood. To give meaning to suffering, it is necessary to know the realms and how they are accepted or rejected by the individuals. So, the purpose of this essay is to clarify the realms that involve human existence and from them to understand the meaning of the individual's suffering. The process of excluding the spiritual realm was long and allowed the strengthening of Descartes' dualism of the Mind and Body. This process was explained by Charles Taylor in his book *A Secular Age* where he mentions the current situation of the Self; also, the philosopher Étienne Gilson in his book *God and Philosophy* talks about the attributes of God and how the attribute "Creator" prevailed over the others. The process of secularization of society gives a point of view to understand the meaning of pain and suffering and even illness and death; but this point of view supported by science is not the only one.

Various authors have tried to make sense of the meaning of the human suffering, but the answer depends on the experience lived by the authors. The notion of God for the christian provides a message of hope and strength to those who suffer because the presence of God is over them, "May the God of peace himself make you perfectly holy and may you entirely, spirit, soul, and body, be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5,23) (Vatican, 2002). There are the three realms mentioned in the phrase: the spirit, soul and body. *Soul* is an old word referring to the word Psychology. Psychology comes from the Greek *psyche* that means breath, principle of life, soul, and life. The New Testament was written in greek language so the word *Soul* refers to the psychological or mental state.

In the Eighteenth Century, Descartes in his book *Discourse on the Method* (1637) wrote the phrase "I think, therefore I am". Descartes realized that he could not doubt that he himself existed so doubting is the way how Descartes confirms the existence. Descartes's dualism started and came to extend to the various aspects of daily life. WWII brought about a lot of destruction and suffering to people. Most of the cited authors had an encounter with the same horror of war, each one in their own circumstances. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross gives us a vision of the pain and suffering caused by WWII and she tells us:

In my quest to figure out who I was and what I wanted to do in life, this message was the sort that helped. The evil of Nazi Germany was punished during the war and continued to be brought to trial afterward. But I realized the wounds inflicted by the war, the residual suffering and pain that were experienced in virtually every home, just as with today's problems of violence, homelessness and AIDS, could not be healed unless people like me, like the IVSP\*, recognized the moral imperative to pitch in and help. (Kübler Ross, 1998, p. 83) \*IVSP means International Voluntary Service for Peace

According to Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, Suffering centers us and allows us to see our own suffering and to feel empathy with the suffering of the other. Sorrow, pain and even death also experience the same process. This presentation will be focus on three major issues. A brief one on a Secular Age, another on Human Suffering and, finally, Holiness is for all.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The methodological work is carried out under the qualitative approach, accompanied by the theory based on various authors who give their perspective based on their own experiences to clarify the terms of pain and suffering. Due to the diversity of positions of authors such as Viktor Frankl, Émmanuel Lévinas, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, Saint Maximilian Kolbe, among others, for whom the text provides brief biographical data to better understand them. The looks at suffering have been divided into two groups: an author or authors influenced by Cartesian dualism and an author or authors that include(s) the transcendence of God.

The historical context is given to us by WWII and the process of secularization of society. Finally, the information was written considering the points of view of the authors on pain and suffering in an organized essay.

## **A SECULAR AGE**

A very famous phrase in sports is: “Mens sana in corpore Sano” by the poet Juvenal, but few people know that the phrase is incomplete, being the original version “orandum est ut sit mens sana in corpore Sano” (Juvenal, 1996, p. 142). It shows a clear reference to prayer in the original sentence what symbolizes an encounter with the divinity; thus, prayer or *orandum* at the beginning of the sentence makes visible a spiritual realm that is not mentioned in Modernity or rather goes unnoticed. Clearly the three realms are shown in the original sentence : the spiritual realm (*oratio*), the psychological realm (*mens*) and the physical realm (*corpus*); these three realms were noted and remained in balance since Ancient Times, “While the Greek philosophers were wondering what place to assign to their gods in a philosophically intelligible world, the Jews had already found the God who was to provide philosophy with an answer to its own question” (Gilson, 1941, p. 38).

The Judeo-Christian religion through the Fathers of the Church found a match in Greek Philosophy, “the Logos” was identified with “the Word” so the God of The Old Testament is incarnated in Jesus Christ “the Messiah” awaited by the prophets who came to save us and to stay with us in the Sacraments. Any Christian convert became familiar with the Greek philosophy and the metaphysical significance of the Logos.

His philosophical first principle had to be one with his religious first principle, and since the name of his God was “I am”, any Christian philosopher had to posit “I am “as his first principle and supreme cause of all things, even in philosophy. To use our own modern terminology, let us say that a Christian’ philosophy is “existencial” in its own right. (Gilson, 1941, p. 41)

Jesus Christ stays with us in the Sacraments that is why He is also known as Emmanuel “God with Us”. The Sacraments transmit the sanctifying grace to us and through baptism we are members of the Church. The Sacraments help us to face the tribulations in life to then participate in the resurrection of Christ for that reason “Every man has his share in the Redemption. Each one is also called to share in the suffering through which the Redemption was accomplished” (II, 2003, p. 40).

Charles Taylor introduces the term “buffered self” in his book *A Secular Age. Volume I* where he mentions the long process that took place in Western Society to dismantle the three realms. This process of Secularization produced a disenchantment in society that is manifested up to this day. The Protestant Reformation, the development of Natural Science, and the appearance of the idea of “individual” were some of the elements that led to this separation. The Catholic Church

had to organize itself internally through the Counter-Reformation at the Council of Trent in 1545 to deal with all these changes. It happens that “The Reformation as Reform is central to the story I want to tell – that of abolition of the enchanted cosmos, and the eventual creation of a humanist alternative to faith (Taylor, 2007, p. 77).

This is “Exclusive Humanism” or “Alternative Humanism” appears in Modernity. The Exclusive Humanism was one of the reasons that began to separate the spiritual realm from the other two realms (physical-psychological). The concept of God is becoming dissociated and even hidden until it almost completely disappears from the other two realms, let us remember that the three realms were once linked and intertwined.

Every person, and every society, lives with or by some conception(s) of what human flourishing is: what constitutes a fulfilled life? what makes life really worth living? What would we most admire people for? We can't help asking these and related questions in our lives. And our struggles to answer them define the view or views that we try to live by, or between which we have. At another level, these views are codified, sometimes in philosophical theories, sometimes in moral codes, sometimes in religious practices and devotion. These and the various ill-formulated practices which people around us engage in constitute the resources that our society offers each one of us as we try to lead our lives. (Taylor, 2007, p. 16)

As Taylor said that “Views” or “Looks” that we have about our society wrap our point of view about the realms for instance the presence of God. God has several attributes such as “Omnipotence”, “Omniscience”, “Omnipresence”, “Creator”, “Omnibenevolence” among others; but in Modernity due to the fact of understanding of Physics and Mechanics and finding the laws that regulate them so only the term “Creator” was necessary among the attributes. God as “Creator” is referring strictly to nature, later Rousseau will use “The voice of nature” in his writings that highlights this particular attribute of God, “Now it is quite true that a Creator is an eminently Christian God, but a God whose very essence is to be a creator is not a Christian God at all. The essence of true Christian God is not to create but to be” (Gilson, 1941, p. 88).

The “buffered self” is strengthened in the changing society, seeking no longer to reach an eternal reality but to establish progress in a temporary reality with eminently practical purposes with the full development of the individual in this world. Not waiting for the resurrection in a future life, the language begins to be modified to a secular language, for instance the word “virtue” is no longer mentioned; instead of “virtue” with use the term “value” as a way of good politeness among individuals. Laymen have created Modern Philosophy instead of churchmen (Gilson, 1941).

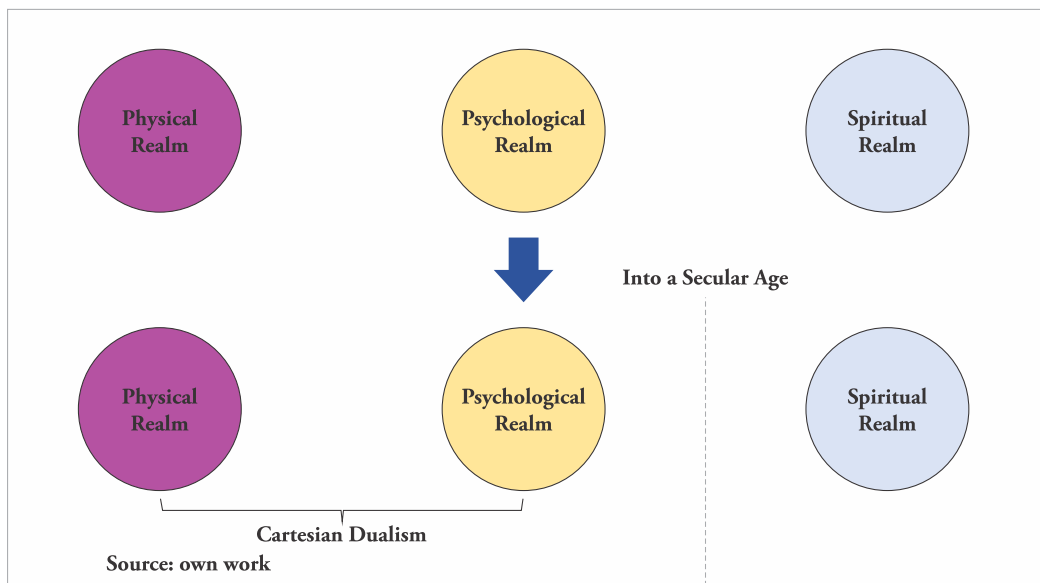
René Descartes in the expression “I think, therefore I am” (Cogito, ergo sum) confirms only two realms (dualism) to existence: The mind (res cogitans) and the body (res extensa). God is considered as an attribute of perfection in thought (res cogitans infinita) so Descartes favored his researches in Mechanics, Physics, Biology, Anatomy and finally Psychology with the location of the pineal soul in the body.

Let the theologians take him to his supreme supernatural Good by means of the wisdom of faith; not only will Descartes have no objection, but he will feel exceedingly grateful. As he himself says: “As much as anyone, I strive to gain heaven”. As a philosopher, however, Descartes was after an entirely different sort of wisdom, that is, the rational knowledge “of the first causes and of the true principles whence the reasons of all that which it is possible to know can be deduced”. Such is the natural and human good, “considered by natural reason without the light of faith”. (Gilson, 1941, p. 77)

Descartes detaches himself from the spiritual realm to existence; therefore, he does not conceive the idea of an incarnate God. He moved away from the Catholic Church and the dogmas of faith. This separation that he proposed allowed science to develop in a variety of investigations for

instance Medicine to cure diseases. Descartes wrote a book named *Le traité de l'homme* in which he studied the body and even began to give a psychophysiological explanation to the experience of pain based on knowledge of the nervous system. He retained religious terms in his philosophy such as soul, meditation, God, silence, but on a secular sense due to his religious experience in a Jesuit College *La Flèche*, “This disengaged, disciplined stance to self and society has become part of the essential defining repertory of the modern identity” (Taylor, 2007, p. 136).

**Figure 1**  
*Secularization of Society*



After separating the spiritual realm, “The Looks” that we have of society changed that is what Taylor proposes in his book *Sources of the Self* how our “Self” goes through a process of deconstruction from the past to a new construction in Modernity. So that the society is divided in people who conceive the existence within the Cartesian dualism and people who conceive the existence with the spiritual realm.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1926-2004) was a swiss-american psychiatrist who deeply studied the human behavior. She worked as a laboratory assistant and helped the refugees at Zürich during WWII. She saw the horror of the war and terrible consequences in suffering and pain of the survivors whom she cured. The horror stories of the survivors left a deep impression on Elisabeth’s mind, and she decided to help and heal others for the rest of her life. She had interviewed many dying people before they passed away so she was able to differentiate somewhat among people who considered death to be the end of their existence and those in whom death was part of their spiritual world.

Religious patients seemed to differ little from those without a religion. The difference may be hard to determine, since we have not clearly defined what we mean by a religious person. We can say here, however, that we found very few truly religious people with an intrinsic faith. (Kübler Ross, 2009, p. 215)

Elisabeth recognised the difference although it was not very clearly. Science strengthened the Self because science offers people the power of self-control; However, science dehumanizes us to a reality to which we are exposed with all the advancements of Modernity. While science has more technological advances, the individual refuses to recognize that one belongs to a temporary reality where death exits (Kübler Ross, 2009).

## HUMAN SUFFERING

Only one human *problem* [emphasis added] is a real problem: the problem of pain. Only one great *mystery* [emphasis added] encloses the existence of man: the mystery of suffering. Solving that problem is the hardest task in life. And also the most necessary. Who does not solve the problem of pain, solves nothing important in his or her life. Whoever discovers the mystery of pain, sublimates all of life and gives it the highest meaning. This is the secret of devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows “Dolorosa”. Illuminate the mystery of human pain; teaches to sublimate the most negative of human existence. From the harsh punishment of the first sin, whoever meditates on the pains of Mary, draws the acceptance that makes him worthy of eternal life. (Artola, 2014, p. 13)

The words in italics in the previous paragraph refers to different topics. Fr. Antonio Artola who is Doctor of Philosophy in Biblical Studies introduces the term “problem” whose definition refers to an issue that seeks an explanation and gives reasons for it; On the other hand, he also proposes the term “mystery” that refers to something that does not have a complete explanation and remains hidden.

Suffering is understood as the feeling of discomfort that occurs during the normal development of the organism. Suffering can have a physical and emotional origin that occurs in a state of full consciousness. It can be said that suffering also encompasses the realms to existence: the physical realm (physical pain), the psychological realm (suffering itself) and even the spiritual realm, the last one is based on the personal relationship with God. The realms are not shown in all the individuals with the same intensity, in some people the physical pain is more persistent while in others the emotional states with a psychological background are more persistent. Human suffering is perceived as harm or threat to the individual that has a similar meaning to the word pain, but *pain* refers more to a physical situation and *suffering* has a broader meaning. C.S. Lewis in *The Problem of Pain* studies the definition of the term pain in which he explains that this word has two meanings.

But the truth is that the word *Pain* [emphasis added] has two senses which must now be distinguished. **A.** A particular kind of sensation, probably conveyed by specialized nerve fibres, and recognizable by the patient as that kind of sensation whether he dislikes it or not (eg, the faint ache in my limbs would be recognised as an ache even if I didn't 't object to it). **B.** any experience, whether physical or mental, which the patient dislikes. It noticed that all Pains in sense **A** become Pains in sense **B** if they are raised above a certain very low of intensity, but that Pains in the **B** sense need not to be Pains in the **A** sense. Pain in the **B** sense, in fact, is synonymous with “suffering”, “anguish”, “tribulation”, “adversity”, or “trouble”, and it is about it that the problem of pain arises”. (Lewis, 2009, p. 87)

The word pain comes from the Latin Verb “Dolere” which has a meaning of “pain, feel pain or causes pain” having a concrete meaning. Pain is detected by the pain receptors through the sensory system which directs the stimuli to the brain where the pain image is developed and returns to the place where the pain was originated. Allopathic physicians inoculate substances in the body to cure diseases in order to disappear, reduce or alleviate pain. *The Pain Threshold* shows the curve in which pain starts to be felt so it is not the same being bitten by mosquito than being bitten a dog.

The first contact with pain is through illness and accidents that involves the physical realm that shows malfunction in the organism, “Sick people often say that the worst thing about being sick is that makes you so self-centered” (Kreeft, 1986, p. 97), so we return again to the philosophical term “buffered self” that looks at himself even in society. Levinas proposes the term “selfishness” as the birth point of the Subject who is already alone, and in this solitude develops his identity. The disease makes us thoughtful and allows us to enter our Self with a strong psychological burden, but as physical pain is reduced or disappears with medical treatments, Suffering does not always disappear in the same way. The split that Descartes caused when he considered only Mind and Body as the only

realms to existence caused that the human being is not seen as a unit, a mistake that now in XXI century is being modified by having an integrative medicine that includes for example: phytotherapy, psychology sessions, and the possibility to embrace faith because the spiritual realm is shown through paintings, a small grotto or a chapel inside many hospitals. Eric J. Cassell in *The Nature of Suffering and the Goals of Medicine* gives his opinion about the reason why Mind and Body were split:

The split between mind and body that has so deeply influenced our approach to medical care was proposed by Descartes to resolve certain philosophical issues. Moreover, cartesian dualism made it possible for Science to escape the control of the church by assigning the noncorporeal, spiritual realm to the church, leaving the physical world as the dominant of Science. (Cassell, 2020, pp. 131–132)

Not all doctors who heal the body and relieve pain, and psychologists who calm the mind have the the same point of view as Eric J. Cassell. Dr. Philippe Madre who is a remarkable physician considers pain and suffering not only explained by two realms to existence, but he is open to the possibility of considering the spritual realm. “It is always the whole person, in his or her deepest unity, that receives a grace of healing, and not just a part of them, be that physical or physiological or spiritual” (ICCRS, 2012, p. 43).

Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995) was a Jewish philosopher born in Lithuania, he was a prisoner of war in World War II. He was in a Nazi concentration camp as prisoner of war while most of his lithuanian family was killed in Auschwitz. He lived the rest of his life in France after WWII. Due to his experience in a Nazi concentration camp and being witness of the horror of war, he considered only two realms so Levinas in *La Trace de l'autre* mentions his position about God. “This God still has a voice. He speaks with a mute voice, and that saying will be heard. But this God is the dead God of Nietzsche. He has taken his own life in Auschwitz” (Levinas, 2001b, p. 104).

The absence of a God that Levinas declares is comprehensible, reason why he proposed the absence of the spiritual realm in his philosophical works so the notion of pain that he raises covers only the physical and psychological realms that follows the proposal from Descartes, thus Levinas in *Entre nous: on thinking -of-the -other* talks about pain.

*Pain* [emphasis added] can become the central phenomenon of the disease state: such is the case of painful diseases, in which joining with other psychological states does not provide any improvement but, on the contrary, adds anguish and helplessness to the own cruelty of suffering. (Levinas, 2001b, p. 117)

Levinas got identified pain and suffering, too. Pain is located on our body (physical realm) while Suffering has basically a psychological content, “Suffering is surely a given in consciousness, a certain psychological content, like the lived experience of colour, of sound, of contact, or like any sensation, unassumable ” (Levinas, 2001a, p. 116). Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in her various studies with dying patients and their families, she comprehends the pain and the suffering that terminally ill patients have during their disease. She identified The 5 Stages of Grief that is a process that can also be used for other events in our lives that cause us pain and suffering like the death of a loved one, a chronic illness, being a refugee in a new country, etc. The 5 stages in progression are Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance.

Peter Kreeft (1937 – present) is a Professor of Philosophy at Boston College and The King’s College, born in The United States, he specializes in Christian Philosophy and has carried out works related to suffering. He converted to Roman Catholicism during his university years; he is the author of numerous books published mostly in the English language. Peter Kreeft in *Three Philosophies of Life* tells us: “Despair is Job’s mood. His suffering from him is not bodily but also spiritual what has he to look forward to except death? He has lost everything, even God, especially

God, it seems” (Kreeft, 1989, p. 11). Kreeft clearly accepts the spiritual realm when he mentions the biblical character “Job” who according to the story was a just and innocent man who had a terrible skin disease, “so Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD and smote Job with severe boils from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head” (Job 2:7-8) (Vatican, 2002). The spiritual realm shows the link between God and the temporary events that occur in the individual, also it explores other elements such as the problem of evil, suffering, the suffering of the innocent, the punishment of the guilty, and the acceptance of the divine will, “It is obvious that pain, especially physical pain, is widespread in the animal world. But only the suffering human being knows that he is suffering and wonders why; and he suffers in a humanly speaking still deeper if he does not find a satisfactory answer” (II, 2003, p. 17).

Suffering is mostly a manifestation with a psychological burden that is perceived as an unpleasant experience. It can even produce anguish which affects the individual and his emotions. Suffering is not always caused by physical pain; however, Suffering has a bodily sensation that can be manifested through stomachache, muscular aches, sweating, paleness, insomnia, among others. The word “Suffering” comes from the verb “suffer” which derives from the Latin verb *Suffero, Suffere* which come from the words: *sub + fero* that means “carry and hide, carry or bear something” in which the individual carries or suffers a pain.

Levinas considers Suffering as “Useless Suffering” because suffering is nonsense and has no importance with the only exception that it can be said that “it is felt by someone” removing any possibility of divine intervention, “The God of traditional philosophy is not the God of Levinas. The language we use with regard to God should be in agreement with our relation to the Other, who is the only ‘place’ where God is revealed” (Peperzak, 1993, p. 35), and through suffering the individual perceives his or her own existence. Knowing the Other through Suffering becomes a path to recognize alterity of the Other so we can move to respond the exterior alterity of the Other by the responsibility.

If there is a meaning in suffering, it allows me myself to the suffering of the Other that transcends me, “In suffering there is the absence of any shelter. It is the fact that it is directly exposed to Being” (Levinas, 1993, p. 109). Levinas looks at suffering as the incomprehensible, the absurd because he understands nothing more than suffering itself; “The absurd consists not in non-sense, but in the isolation of the innumerable meanings in the absence of a sense that guides them” (Levinas, 1974, p. 45); however, this suffering allows to see the relationship with the Other, it is paradoxical because Levinas does not give meaning to suffering itself but this situation makes him encounter the Other. Suffering of the Other gives meaning to my own suffering, my pain helps me better to understand the pain of the Other because we have experienced situations of suffering and allows us to encounter “face to face” with the Other, so we get out of our selfishness. It is clear to understand Levinas’s language in an *éthique de la souffrance* and its reaction against the trend in psychology and philosophy that focuses on the Self in Modernity. One lives in the world of the Other and the other is outside of oneself, and goes out of oneself to look for the other. It is the call from the Other by which Levinas thinks about the transcendence of the Other, “The Other God, in comparison, the one that is not statistically verifiable and that only appears as a *fait accompli* of humanity, it is a protest against Auschwitz. And this God appears in the face of the Other” (Levinas, 2001b, p. 104). Levinas uses constantly the word “Face” when he refers to the Other because the term “Face” is used to indicate the alterity of the Other (Peperzak, 1993).

The Judeo-Christian tradition is not far from the notion of suffering but in Judaism it was closely linked to the sin committed and is associated with divine punishment, hence Job’s friends ask him if he had committed any offense to God, “Though I am innocent, I myself can not know it; I despise my life. It is all one! Therefore I say: Both the innocent and the wicked he destroys” (Job 9, 21-22) (Vatican, 2002).



Obviously, The spiritual realm is linked to human suffering, hence suffering is explained in the light of faith. Suffering as a mystery is so real that it touches our humanity, which was depicted in Job (Old Testament) and Jesus Christ (New Testament). Both Job and Jesus Christ show a very deep suffering that is the suffering of the innocent in which Peter Kreeft describes his point of view of this mystery:

Job is a mystery. A mystery satisfies something in us, but not our reason. The rationalist in us repelled by Job, as Job's three rationalist friends were repelled by Job. But something deeper in us is deeply satisfied by Job, and is nourished. (Kreeft, 1989, p. 61)

What reason cannot understand, faith helps it by giving it meaning in its spiritual realm so we have a clear example in the life of Saint Augustine who searched a long path to find clarity in the light of faith and through faith he received a new understanding (Pope Francis, 2013). The spiritual realm wraps and gives meaning to the human suffering in the person of Christ *Vir Dolorum* as it was mentioned by the prophet Isaiah in the reading of Good Friday of the Lord's Passion who tells us:

See, my servant shall prosper, he shall be raised high and greatly exalted. Even as many were amazed at him - so marred was his look beyond that of man, and his appearance beyond that of mortals - So shall he startle many nations, because of him kings shall stand speechless; For those who have not been told shall see, those who have not heard shall ponder it. Who would believe what we have heard? To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? He grew up like a sapling before him, like a shoot from the parched earth; There was in him no stately bearing to make us look at him, nor appearance that would attract us to him. He was spurned and avoided by men, *a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity* [emphasis added], One of those from whom men hide their faces, spurned, and we held him in no esteem. Yet it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured, While we thought of him as stricken, as one smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins, Upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed. (Isaiah 52,13- 53,5), (Vatican, 2002)

The Christian's task is to recognize the suffering of Christ and unite our suffering to Him which would have a salvific and redemptive meaning. Faith acts and sends the grace to face difficulties in life for instance the Saints are recognized for their exceptional faith. The martyrs are saints who offer their lives for Christ for example Saint Maximilian Kolbe. Saint Maximilian Kolbe (1894-1941) was born in Zduńska Wola (Poland), his real name was Raymund. He entered to Conventual Franciscan Friars where he studied Philosophy and Theology. He gained a Doctorate in Philosophy at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome in 1915, and later Doctor in Theology. Maximilian founded and joined the Militia Immaculatae for his faith in the Virgin Mary through the Miraculous Medal. He died in Auschwitz Concentration Camp on August 14th, 1941. He volunteered died in place of another prisoner. Maximilian and Levinas were in Nazi Concentration Camps so both suffered and had difficulties inside them. They only differ greatly in faith. While Maximilian offered his sufferings and the proximity to death by sharing his own suffering in the suffering of Christ; On the other hand, Levinas faced the proximity to suffering named it "useless suffering" because suffering only confirms the existence and breaks the solitude in which one finds oneself. The proximity to death provokes that one can escape oneself from the selfishness and solitude to see something more that only the existence by itself so one recognizes the transcendence that lead us to a radical passivity. "Suffering, in its hurt and it in-spite-of-consciousness, is passivity" (Levinas, 2001a, p. 116) because Suffering goes from activity to passivity, hence the proximity to death is suffering because the Subject far from all light leads his activity to his passivity (Levinas, 1993).

*Omnipresence* is one of the attributes of God that means that God is present in all situations in the light of Faith, but not in all of them God shows himself in a sensitive way. *Sensitive* means a situation of consolation at a spiritual level caused by the divine presence. The “consolation and desolation” are “motions” or spiritual experiences proposed by Saint Ignatius of Loyola.

Just as God allowed Satan to deprive Job of all his possessions, including his children, so for the perfect atonement for the human sin of disobedience, the Father allowed his son to be abandoned of all consolation, sensible aid and spiritual joy that console him in combat. In Job, the devil even touched the body of the holy patriarch, wounding him with a terrible and disgusting disease. Exactly the same thing the Father did with Jesus in Gethsemane. (Artola, 2013, p. 68)

Suffering and the experience of proximity to death are ways how to recognize the suffering in the Other so the meaning of one's suffering is recognizing the suffering of the Other and not being indifferent to it. Levinas could speak Russian so he read the books of Fyodor Dostoyevsky in his youth. Levinas gives us an example of compassion when the Other through suffering is recognized by the Self, “There is a scene in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* where, referring to Sonya Marmeladov who looks at Raskolnikov in his despair, Dostoyevsky speaks of ‘insatiable compassion’ (Levinas, 1974, p. 56). This spiritual realm is not only known by the Judeo-Christian tradition. Buddha is an example how people recognize and internalize suffering. Buddha states that “Life is Suffering” in itself and uses the words *dukkha* (suffering, discomfort) as opposed to *Sukha* (happiness, well-being) to understand suffering. Buddha proposes four noble truths in the following sequence: 1.- Life is suffering, 2.- Cause of suffering, 3.- The cessation of suffering, Nirvana and 4.- The path to disappear suffering. Recognizing that life is suffering is the first step in the Buddha's thought, thus Peter Kreeft in *Making Sense out of Suffering* states that:

The life is suffering (*dukkha*: the word means a bone or axle out of its socket, broken, alienated from itself) We are born in suffering, we live in suffering, we die in suffering. To have what you wish you hadn't and not to have what you wish you had, is suffering. (Kreeft, 1986, p. 3)

Peter Kreeft mentions that suffering can be divided into two groups: Suffering caused by human being that produces moral evil and suffering caused by nature for instance a Tsunami (Kreeft, 2014). Moral evil is the social situation produced by the behavior of man in front others that generates conflicts, and its origin is in the human freedom based on the capacity to “decide” and even to decide to cause harm to Others such as class conflicts, violence, crime and war. Levinas observes “Guilt” and “Innocence” from a secular and philosophical approach in which one acquires the notions of “guilty” or “innocent” in relation to Others and this situation allows and leave the Self to look at the Other with compassion so Levinas talks about it:

In this perspective a radical difference develops between *suffering in the Other*, which for *me* is unpardonable and solicits me and calls me, and suffering in me, my own adventure of suffering whose constitutional or congenital uselessness can take on a meaning, the only meaning to which suffering is susceptible, in becoming a suffering for the suffering – be it inexorable of someone else”. (Levinas, 2001a, p. 119)

The individual is part of society that is not “an isolated being” and is linked to a group. Both pain and suffering also occur in a social context, and thus they affect the physical and emotional health of people that cause stress, anxiety, fear, anguish, etc, and even the personality is greatly influenced by emotions.

Levinas identifies the spiritual realm due to his Jewish roots, but he diverts it towards psychology and not allowing the transcendence in God as Being that transcends. Levinas joined his life experience with the experience of “Non-sensitive God” in his philosophy, “The ontological scheme

offered by revealed religions – a self in relation to a transcendent God – reconciles these contradictions” (Levinas, 2001a, p. 32). Levinas aims at the temporary reality where the individual lives and relates with Others; however, not all individuals have their gaze on the Other so it is there when suffering acts as an alarm clock, and allows them to see the face of the Other and the trace of God in the Other, a God who has already left.

Saint Vincent de Paul, a French saint in the 17th century, had an experience of finding Christ in the suffering who was represented in the poor, thus Fr. Alvaro Quevedo CM tells us:

When St. Vincent saw himself and allowed himself to be invaded by God, he began to see the world in a different way than he had seen it until then. He acquires the evangelical sense of the poor. Vincent turns the medal over and surrounded in light of faith, contemplates the poor as icons of Jesus Christ “who wanted to be poor and who shows himself to us through the poor...” the poor are in Christ and Christ is in the poor”. (Quevedo Patarroyo, 2000, p. 2)

Saint Maximilian Kolbe and Levinas didn't meet each other; however, Maximilian was sure of his faith and the spiritual realm that surrounds us and the true conviction of seeing the other as his “neighbor”, reaching the extreme of giving his life for the other because he recognizes in his faith that Christ is in the neighbor. Christ who lives within him is also in the neighbor. This situation in which Christ is in the neighbor reminds me a speech that belongs to Fr. Philip Scott who is founder of the religious community “Family of Jesus” and he said:

...But the only thing I know is that suddenly, *He* [emphasis added] who arises to see *Him* [emphasis added] (in that person), He is *Jesus looking at Jesus* [emphasis added] (in that person), and the beauty of that person (of Jesus in that person) leaves me thunderstruck. There are things that I never never never I would think to notice. (Ross, 2018)

Suffering was part of the thought of Maximilian Kolbe since his childhood. As a child he had a vision where the Virgin Mary showed him two crowns, one of them being of martyrdom, “Fra. Kolbe held a particular maxim very close to his heart about him: ‘a man's life has three stages, namely, his preparation for his work, the work itself, and *suffering*[emphasis added]’ ” (Immaculae, 2018, p. 46). Maximilian Kolbe offered suffering as a source of grace, not only in a particular situation of extreme suffering as his stylelife.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit we take part in Christ's Passion by dying to sin, and in his resurrection by being born to a new life; we are members of this Body which is the Church (Cf 1 Cor 12), branches grafted onto the vine which is himself (cf Jn 15, 1-4). (Vatican, 1993, no. 1988)

When Elisabeth Kübler-Ross helped the refugees, her actions awakened in her the desire to help others. She compared Switzerland that was not affected by WWII with the rest of Europe that was in poverty and misery. Elisabeth projected herself onto the other through pain and suffering. After many years and various interviews with patients, Elisabeth came to the conclusion that it is “love” that motivates the detachment of one and moves our Self to the others, “there were no guarantee in life, except that everyone faces struggles. It is how we learn. Some face struggle from the moment they are born. They are most special of all people, requiring the most care and compassion and reminding us that love is the sole purpose of life” (Kübler Ross, 1998, p. 240).

Levinas recognizes that in the presence of the Other, my relationship is not with an object because it is Subject to Subject. When we identify the Other, we acquire the notion “being – for – the - other”, a fact that occurs and awakens the sense of responsibility in the Self. The responsibility increases my response to the call of the Other. When this responsibility for the Other exceeds the Self and the present, it is named “substitution” that is based on the “expiation for others” proposed by the Bible. The concept of substitution in Levinas's thought consisted is an attempt to put the Oth-

er as the one who frees the Self from the opposition of itself and of the present (Herrero, 2017). Levinas in his book *Le temps et l'autre* describes that the existence of the Self lives in complete solitude with the phrase “I am not the other. I am in Solitude” that means the substitution frees the Self from solitude what Taylor would call “atomism”. This “being-for- the other” in a spiritual realm means “Love your neighbor”. Levinas kept in contact with Karol Wojtyla (Pope John Paul II) and they participated in many conferences and interviews at Castel Gandolfo. The purpose of those conferences had the intention to explain better “Practical Philosophy” to be used in everyday life because Levinas’ thought and “Social Doctrine of the Church” have the same interest in common. Levinas’ proposal in *Humanisme de l'autre homme* has the same goal that many social programs guided by the Catholic Church for that reason “around this ethical proposal, which is one of the lessons of the Second World War, there is the friendship between Karol Wojtyla and Emmanuel Levinas” (Serna, 2011, p. 24).

## HOLINESS

*L'humanisme* that Levinas proposes is closely related to the term “neighbor” by the Judeo-Christian tradition. Levinas proposes the term “Holiness” that happens when the Self detaches itself so much and projects itself in a particular way in the Other so intensely that it detaches itself from its own Self. Levinas shows his idea of Holiness in *La trace de l'autre* where one feels so deeply enchanted by the Other that one can feel the proximity to death as if it were oneself. “The only value that cannot be denied is that of Holiness, and Holiness is the possibility of feeling more intensely *the being-for-the-death* of the other than my own *being-for-death*” (Levinas, 2001b, p. 102). The suffering in the Other awakens the ethics in Levinas’ thought. His thought is closely linked to the notion of responsibility that Levinas proposes in my relationship with the Other, because even in the search for our own well-being we can cause the suffering of another person. Indifference occurs in society because one does not see in the individual “an other” so holiness is to be sought on earth, among individuals, in the concern and care of others (Lacroix, 2018).

Saint Maximilian Kolbe lived the holiness found in Jesus Christ that according to the Catechism is expressed in, “The grace of the Holy Spirit has the power to justify us, that is, to cleanse us from our sins and to communicate to us ‘the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ’ and through Baptism” (Vatican, 1993, no. 1987). All baptized are being called to holiness, being a universal vocation. Faith is not only an isolated situation towards God but it is manifested in concrete actions which lead to “Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy” with Others. Saint Maximilian Kolbe offered his own life as a sharing in the sufferings of Christ by seeing the suffering of the Other “his neighbor” so Pope John Paul II declared Maximilian Kolbe to be a Roman Catholic saint with these words:

No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends (Jo 15,13)

From this day forward the Church wishes to call a man “Saint” a man who was granted to carry out in an absolutely literal manner the aforementioned words of the Redeemer. (II, 1982, p. 1)

Finally, it seems appropriate to mention Viktor Frankl (1905 -1992) who was an austrian psychiatrist and philosopher, he is well-known as the creator of the term “Logotherapy”. Frankl survived Auschwitz Concentration Camp and knew the suffering and pain inside it, in his youth he was a disciple of Alfred Adler from whom he separates for having different conceptions about the relationship between the individual and society. Frankl mentions that there is a freedom that no one can take away from you, it is the freedom to “choose” that all people have in any situation and even in situations of great pain or extreme.

Adler proposed “Individual psychology” with considerable social influence in the Self (psycho-social Self) what Frankl perceived as inflexible or rigid because it restricted the individu-

alized behavior in his face to future and did not contemplate the particular situations of those individuals. Frankl focuses on the singularity of the Self and considers choosing the spiritual realm among the options. Frankl gave meaning to life through one's own reflection and the courage to face extreme situations for which one must awaken to the spiritual realm; "yet it is possible to practice the art of living even in a concentration camp, although suffering is omnipresent" (Frankl, 1985, p. 55).

The terrible suffering that Dr. Frankl experienced at Auschwitz with daily situations such as witnessing human beings being taken to the gas chambers, the smoke from cremations and mistreatment of various kinds. They made Frankl first recognize pain and suffering in the two realms (physical and psychological). Levinas states that the presence of the proximity to death "breaks with the Self" because we can not control it. For Dr. Frankl this breaking caused the awaking of spiritual realm in the individual and to find alternative exits to face the present suffering. It must be understood that in this sense "exit" is not an escape or departure from reality to enter a world of fantasy, this search is carried out consciously, "In some way, suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning (Frankl, 1985, p. 117).

Viktor Frankl wrote *The man in search of meaning* in which he told us his experience in a Concentration Camp. This book in the Spanish version (1991) published by Herder does not include a section at the end that does appear in the English version entitled: "The Case of Tragic Optimism". This section is dedicated to Edith Weisskopf – Joelson, Doctor of Psychology from the University of Vienna who contributed to bringing Logotherapy to the USA. "Tragic Optimism" refers to aspects of human existence which is surrounded by the triad: pain, guilt and death which after understanding them, lead us from the meaning of suffering to "knowing how to suffer", as Frankl in the English version *Man's search for meaning* tells us:

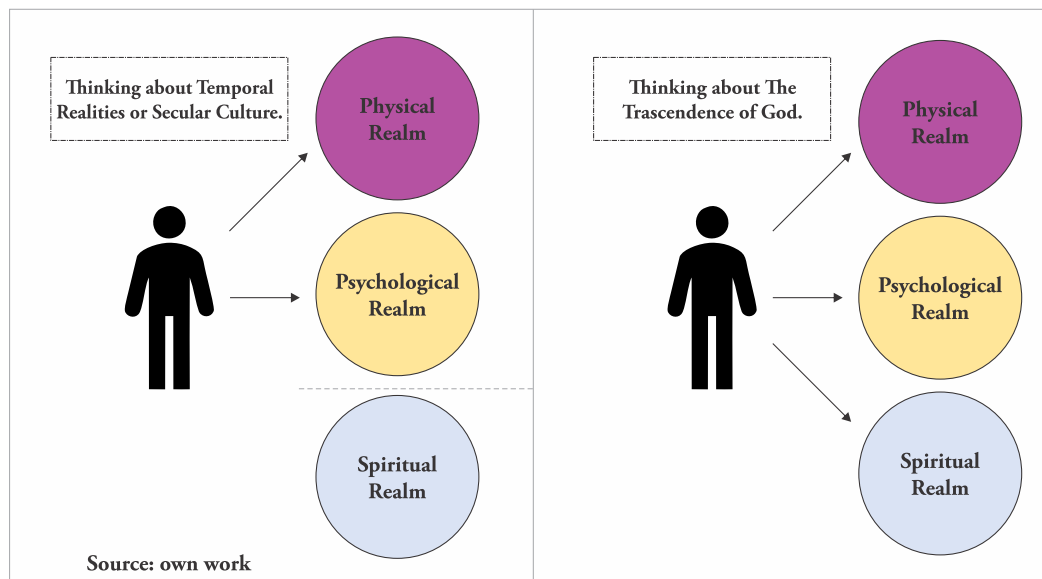
Sigmund Freud once asserted, "Let one attempt to expose a number of the most diverse people uniformly to hunger. With the increase of the imperative urge of hunger all individual differences will blur, and in their stead will appear the uniform expression of the one unstilled urge." Thank heaven, Sigmund Freud was spared knowing the concentration camps from the inside. His subjects lay on a couch designed in the plush style of Victorian culture, not in the filth of Auschwitz. There, the "individual difference" did not blur but, on the contrary, people became more different; people unmasked themselves, both the swine and the saints. And today you need no longer hesitate to use the word "saints": think of Father Maximilian Kolbe who was starved and finally murdered by an injection of carbolic acid at Auschwitz and who in 1983 was canonized. (Frankl, 1985, p. 154)

Frankl clearly proposes the example of Saint Maximilian Kolbe in an extreme situation at the end of his book, in which there was a detachment from his own Self in the light of Faith. Maximilian got sanctified himself when he looked at the neighbor and had the free will to die instead of him. This holiness fits perfectly into the proposal of substitution moved by the responsibility of the Other from Emmanuel Levinas. It is up to you to consider two or three realms to existence and define your life-giving.

## OUTCOMES

**Figure 2**

*Giving the meaning of Suffering*



1. Identifying pain and suffering is a lifelong task, but once one identifies them, one must proceed to give meaning to tough situations in one's life. The meaning of suffering depends on the beliefs that one has internalized and are part of one's identity; therefore, one knows that the first realm is physical pain that is treated by medicine; The emotional or psychological problems which are treated by professional psychologists and psychiatrists. Many medical specialists are not always in agreement to explore the psychological realm and many psychologists do not identify the spiritual realm because it depends on the belief that each one has. The spiritual realm embraces religion as the teachings of Buddha, the presence of Yahweh and his company in our life depicted in Psalm 23 (Jewish tradition) and the fullness of the Christian Faith expressed in the Gospels of Saint Matthew, Saint Mark, Saint Luke and Saint John that inspire us to share our suffering in the suffering of Jesus Christ. *L'humanisme* considered by Levinas in his approach to the Other is basically in values to alleviate the suffering of Others.

Due to lived experiences and particular situations, one can move from Cartesian dualism to consider the spiritual realm.

As Elisabeth Kübler-Ross continued her work in death and dying, she gradually developed a strong belief in everlasting life. As Kübler-Ross herself admitted, she was not a religious person and did not have a faith in God or in life after death. However, interviews with hundreds and hundreds of patients changed her mind. (Worth, 2005, p. 62)

On the other hand, one can also have the opposite experience, as in the case of Levinas, who, despite having Jewish roots, he does not recognize the transcendence of God due to his experience in a Nazi Concentration Camp.

The restoring of our health after an illness in the physical realm is called "healing" which is related in an opposite way to the term "disease". Medicine contemplates a broader vision because it involves professional psychologists in diagnoses, too. The spiritual realm focuses in the light of faith so it depends if you are a believer or not. The word "heal" has a broader meaning because it does not only involves the physical realm for instance San Martín de Porres who was a Peruvian saint used to say: "I only cure you, it is God who heals you", a phrase that expresses not only the deep desire to restore health but it mentions the connection between the realms.

2. Individuals have a sociocultural background because they are part of a society and people suffer when they are lost or do not give meaning to suffering because the complexity of the human being is huge that is necessary to be studied in many aspects. When suffering is activated, it produces besides its own bodily reactions, a series of emotions such as sadness, bitterness, anger, depression, guilt, melancholy, etc. One should not see suffering as an abstract fact because it can be identified and located. Suffering is experienced by someone and it produces emotions and feelings within oneself, for instance, love. “Love is the satisfied self by the Other, the One who finds in another the justification of his being” (Levinas, 2001a, p. 34). Elisabeth Kübler-Ross also takes the same point of view as Levinas and recognizes “love”. She considers love as an emotion to give affection and meaning to the suffering of another. She recognizes the other in all of her being and it is a detachment from her Self towards the encounter with the other.

From Kübler-Ross’s viewpoint, love is the greatest of the human emotions. This includes the ability to express warmth and affection for another person: Another type of love is the willingness of parents to help their children achieve independence. Finally, love means unconditional acceptance of another human being, whatever their accomplishments, whatever their faults, whatever their physical disabilities”. (Worth, 2005, p. 68)

These situations are comparable to the biblical message, “The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22,39). Levinas does not intend to make a Theology; on the contrary, his purpose is to reestablish ethics in our relationships with others, reaching the conclusion in a resounding way that has the same meaning as the biblical message so people ignore the enormous levels of suffering in society when one does not see the Other “The neighbor”.

3. The look of Levinas’ thought in a Secular Age is a way of entering the Other through suffering that manifests itself in the individual. Suffering is observable in most cases in the body of the individual. The medical term “invisible illnesses” is used to explain something more about the realms because many diseases are silent like cancer in its early stages which cannot be detected with the naked eye, and physicians must enter the patient through various analyzes to detect the malfunction of the organism. There is unity in the three realms, for instance, the cure of a certain disease was successfully cured by physicians; however, the psychology of the patients had different developments during the disease. The physical pain is gone but the psychological suffering remains due to memory. Memory plays a key role to integrate the realms. Therefore, Memory is closely linked to the painful memory that causes suffering which is stored in the passive memory, but when we have memories or associations with that fact, it becomes active and generates suffering. Painful traumatic events can be “memories” that can be originated in the past or currently times because each person has a past so the experiences lived are part of our present as well as our past (Cassell, 2020). Suffering lives within people on a passive way that psychoanalysts call the unconscious. Levinas proposes that people are active subjects when they are in contact with the environment and their bodies are receptors of sensations, and people became only passive when they perceive something that exceeds their Selves. Knowing in this way that suffering has a certain relation to psychoanalysis because there is an inner suffering that is not popped up and many psychological sessions because they are mostly based on painful experiences from the past similar to “invisible illnesses”.

When one experiences suffering, one goes from being active to passive subjects as simple receptors from the sensations, and in the case of death for Levinas, “It only comes” and shows its proximity to the Self as a consequence “Pain would limit such freedom to the point of compromising self-consciousness, permitting man the identity of a thing only in the passivity of the submission” (Levinas, 2001a, p. 116). Elisabeth Kübler-Ross gives us a different meaning to death. She inter-

viewed many terminally ill patients who believed in everlasting life. Everlasting life was the research topic to which Elisabeth was dedicated the rest of her life.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross adopted the butterfly as the symbol of the transition from death to life after death. Like the butterfly, humans spend much of their times in a cocoon- the human body. At death, they shed the human body, the cocoon, and are transformed into a beautiful butterfly. (Worth, 2005, p. 64)

Levinas' thought proposes the phrase *Humanisme de l'autre homme* that allows oneself to leave his own Self to meet and help the society. This *Humanisme* would break with the "Exclusive Humanism" that Charles Taylor identifies in A Secular Age where the "buffered self" exists. The society aided by *L'humanisme* promotes values such as heroism, patriotism and sacrifice to give meaning to Suffering. These actions according to Levinas' thought is a way of "responsibility" to the Other.

## CONCLUSION

Suffering is one of the greatest experiences that shapes the life of the individual. It is true that Modernity influences the formation of the Self because it is based on the buffered self of Cartesian dualism and it's the separation from the spiritual realm. Many of the issues of Modernity such as the infirmity, the suffering, the grief, the pain, etc., can give meaning depending on "The looks" whether we use the spiritual realm or not. Therefore, when Suffering happens, there are two options, one can either move away and return to ourselves with more strength to reject the painful experience or one goes in search of the meaning of suffering. There is a famous painting named "Young Hare" by Albrecht Dürer. "Young Hare" remains in complete darkness many years in order not to be damaged by the lights because "It is in its burrow", but after a sometime it is shown in an art exhibition so this is a long process of hiding and showing this painting. When "Young Hare" comes out, it causes astonishment, surprise and joy to those who see it. The Self is very similar to "Young Hare" because the decision is in the palm of each one, either one lives in darkness locked in oneself or one goes out and finds the "Other", one's "neighbor" in the way.

### ORCID

 **Abel Antonio Salazar-García:** Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, Lima, Perú.

### FINANCING

This investigation was self-funded.

### CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

### GRATITUDE

To Saint Vincent de Paul with his phrase: "Give me a man of prayer, and he will be capable of everything".

### REVIEW PROCESS

This study has been peer-reviewed and double-blinded.

Revisor A: **Kevin Mario Laura-De La Cruz**, klaurac@unjbg.edu.pe

Revisor B: **Yolanda Aroquiipa-Durán**, yolandaaroquiipa@gmail.com

### RESPONSIBLE EDITOR

 **Carlos Fernando Velez-Gutiérrez**, carlos.velezgutierrez@ucaldas.edu.co

### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The database of the present research will be available to the scientific community upon request to the corresponding author.



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**CITE AS:**

Salazar-Garcia, A. A. (2022). Looks in search of the meaning of the human suffering. *Puriq*, 4, e329. <https://doi.org/10.37073/puriq.4.329>