D*oes the existence of evil provide good evidence God does not exist?*

With every passing moment, we read about another child being kidnapped, another school victim to a shooting, and another innocent family starving simply because they cannot afford rent. Every day, it seems we are confronted with a world that presents to us scenes of senseless suffering. It is this world that forces us to confront deeply held values, because if there was a God that was all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-benevolent, then why does it feel like the world is one of evil?

This is the core dilemma posited in the problem of evil. If it were to be held that God has the foresight, ability, and will to eliminate suffering, then the continued existence of evil seems to contradict Him. It is as Epicurus put it,

> *"Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?"*

Modern philosophers have developed Epicurus' original formulation, framing the problem in two distinct ways. The first is the **logical problem of evil**, which argues that God and evil cannot logically coexist—if God is all-good, all-powerful, and all-knowing, then suffering should not exist. The second is the **evidential problem of evil**, which takes a softer approach. It argues that the vast amount and intensity of suffering in the world make God's existence unlikely. Even if some suffering has a purpose, surely not all of it does.

In the face of this, many defend God's existence through three main arguments: Greater Good, Free Will, and Natural Law. Yet, all three defences seem unconvincing under scrutiny. The greater good argument claims that suffering is necessary because it serves a higher purpose. The **soul-making theodicy**, for example, argues that hardship is essential for moral

development. Without struggle, there would be no opportunities for growth. A world without suffering, in this view, would be one without moral depth.

At first glance, this appears reasonable. We often hear stories of people emerging from adversity with greater strength. But this argument has serious flaws. Consider those who suffered the worst forms of suffering; Holocaust survivors like Viktor Frankl have written about how extreme suffering can break a person rather than refine them. And even if suffering occasionally produces goodness, does that justify allowing all suffering?

The logical extension of this argument is that humanity ought not to intervene in any manner, for we may be preventing a greater good from forming. This is unsettling, as it leads us down a slippery slope of non-action in a day where action—in climate change, drug research, and diplomacy—is most definitely needed.

Even more troubling is the fact that this explanation does nothing to account for **non-human suffering**. If evil exists to build character, why do animals endure so much pain? Predation, starvation, and disease existed for millions of years before humans even arrived—long before moral growth was even a possibility. If a benevolent God designed the world, why would He create a system where so much suffering occurs for no clear reason?

To remedy such gaps, believers turn to the free will argument, one of the most common defences against the problem of evil. It posits that since our moral value comes from our autonomy, God must not intervene in ways that subvert our ability to act as free and autonomous beings. Hence, for things like love and good to be meaningful, it must be freely chosen, even if this means that humans sometimes choose wrong.

It is worth noting that this defence omits natural evils. After all, there is no ‘free will’ of the tsunami that killed over 130 thousand in Aceh in 2004 or the earthquake that destroyed

millions of livelihoods in Kashmir in 2005. While some like Alvin Plantinga may suggest that natural disasters might be caused by supernatural beings like fallen angels, it seems unwise to open Pandora's box to address this problem, and so, applying Occam's Razor, the hypothesis that God does not exist may be the simpler and more reasonable conclusion.

Even when we only consider human evils, it is, as JL Mackie puts it, entirely within God's ability to create humans that could simply always choose to be good. However, I recognise that this response is semi-persuasive at best. If humans always chose to be good, then did they truly choose? Perhaps such a formulation is possible, but it would also be as speculative as Plantinga's defence. Hence, while such a response may remain weak, the looming question of natural evils remains a large issue.

Let's now delve into this problem of natural evils. At first blush, it seems necessary for such natural evils to exist. Not because of 'free will', but because they are part of natural laws. The physical universe operates according to fixed laws—such as gravity, thermodynamics, and plate tectonics—which are essential for the existence of life. However, these same laws that enable life to flourish also bring about suffering, like how plate tectonics help regulate Earth's climate but also cause earthquakes.

But why must the suffering be so extreme? Could God not temper the consequences of such laws? Philosophers like Macy West defend this position by making an argument from consistency: if God were to constantly temper the consequences of natural laws, He would fundamentally alter the very nature of these laws, stripping them of their reliability and predictability. This would alter the foundation of our scientific knowledge, with the problem of induction becoming more than a philosophical problem.

We can however critique the argument from another angle: intensity. Perhaps God should not withhold the impacts of plate tectonics only when it inconveniences humans, but it is

entirely plausible he could alter the laws of physics to reduce the intensity and sheer impact of such natural phenomena. If so, the need for, quite literally, life-ruining natural disasters becomes null.

By this point, it is evident that the three theistic defences against the problem of evil fail to hold up against a myriad of attacks on both the human and natural fronts. The existence of evil thus indeed provides good evidence against the existence of God.

But there is a catch. The problem of evil is only a problem if God were to fulfil the tripartite definition of all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-benevolent. But what if God did not indeed possess these characteristics? This is the metaphysical debate that the problem of evil is premised upon—that we cannot say, for certain, that God is who religious scholars claim Him to be. Multiple arguments against this tripartite definition have been put up, including Boethieus' Problem of Divine Foreknowledge, and Aquinas' Paradox of Omnipotence.

While I won't delve deeply into these challenges, they undeniably shake the foundation of the arguments presented. Ultimately, the conclusion we reach is conditional yet clear: if God is truly as described—omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent—then He cannot exist in a world so rife with suffering. If He does exist, then He is not as we have imagined, and the problem of evil is no longer a contradiction, but a call to rethink God's very nature and purpose.