4. Mackie 1955, The problem of evil

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Definitions

· You are **omniscient** if: whenever you believe something, it's true; and whenever something is true, you believe it's true.
· You are **omnipotent** if: everything is such that if you were to all-things-considered want it to be true, it would be true.
· You are **omnibenevolent** if: you want the world to be as good as possible.

Consider the hypothesis that there is a omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent God. That hypothesis faces the *problem of evil*:

P1 If there is an omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent God, then the world would be as good as possible.

P2 If the world were as good as possible, no terrible things would happen.

P3 Terrible things do happen.

C Therefore, there is no omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent God.

This argument looks valid.

P3 looks clearly true. So to deny C we must reject P1 or P2.

Against P2: If God prevented all terrible things, we would not have free will. That would be a worse world.

· *Objection:* Some terror is not human-caused.
· *Reply:* These events are needed to shape human character and develop human freedom.
· *Counter-Reply:* Are they? Then God is not omnipotent.

Against P2: Terrible things are *necessary* for good things to happen; if terrible things didn't happen, the world would be worse.

· *Objection:* Two readings of 'necessary': *causal* vs. *constitutive*.
· Causal reading? True, but an omnipotent being can change the causal laws!
· Constitutive reading? May be true that *some* terrible things are necessary; but for there to be an omnipotent, omnibenevolent God, it must be that *all* terrible things are necessary.

Against P1: There is no best possible world. For every world, we can imagine a better one (e.g. that includes one more happy, fulfilling life).

Compare:
If it rained last night, the streets would be wet.
If the streets were wet, they'd be slippery.
The streets are not slippery.
Therefore, it didn't rain last night.

E.g. March 11, 2011 tsunami near Japan. Killed around 20,000 people.

We can *imagine* people with better characters, even without such trauma.

Eating is *causally* necessary for staying alive.
Having four sides is *constitutively* necessary for being a square.

Compare: your goal is to name the highest integer ("integer-benevolent"); you know their complete ordering ("integer-omniscient"); you can name any integer ("integer-omnipotent").
Still, no matter what integer you name, it could've been higher.