

Let's begin by reminding ourselves where we were last time. I'm going to do so by presenting the issues we discussed in a slightly different, I think easier to understand, way.

Recall that Mackie's original argument included this premise:

6. If something is wholly good, it always eliminates as much evil as it can.

We then noted that this seems, in general, false. Sometimes it is good not to eliminate an evil even if you can — namely when that evil brings about some greater good, and it is impossible for you to bring about that good without the evil (or something else equally bad). Examples: dentists cause pain, parents put their kids in time-out.

6. If something is wholly good, it always eliminates as much evil as it can.

Let's say that some evil E is allowable-for-X just in case two things are true:

(1) E brings about some good G which outweighs E, and

(2) X cannot bring about G without E (or some other comparable evil).

Let's say that some evil E is forbidden-for-X otherwise — either, that is, if there is no outweighing good, or if X could have brought about the good without the evil.

Our examples show that some evils are allowable-for-dentists and allowable-for-parents.

Others, of course, are forbidden-for-dentists and forbidden-for-parents. Indeed, these examples make it very plausible that it is always bad for a being to permit some evil which is forbidden-for-it.

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Others, of course, are forbidden-for-dentists and forbidden-for-parents. Indeed, these examples make it very plausible that it is always bad for a being to permit some evil which is forbidden-for-it.

And this tells us how Mackie should fix his argument. He should replace (6) with the following premise:

6*. If something is wholly good, it always eliminates as much evil which is forbidden-for-it as it can.

Our examples of parents and dentists cast no doubt on (6*). Indeed, if anything, they support it.

- 1. God exists.
- 2. If God exists, then God is omnipotent.
- 3. If something is omnipotent, it can do anything.
- 4. If God exists, then God can do anything. (2,3)
- 5. If God exists, then God is wholly good.
- 6*. If something is wholly good, it always eliminates as much evil which is forbidden-for-it as it can.
- 7*. If God exists, then God eliminates as much forbidden-for-God evil as God can. (5,6*)
- 8*. If God exists, then God eliminates all forbidden-for-God evil. (4,7*)
- 9*. If God exists, then there is no forbidden-for-God evil. (8*)
- 10*. There is no forbidden-for-God evil. (1,9*)
- 11*. Some forbidden-for-God evil exists.
- C. There is and is not forbidden-for-God evil. (10*,11*)

We can then recast Mackie's argument in this way, with the key independent premises in red.

Last time we suggested that one might reject (11*). Let's think about that option.

11*. Some forbiddenfor-God evil exists. To reject (11*) is to say that every bit of evil we find in the world is allowable-for-God.

Mackie's response to this is clear: even if some evils are allowable-for-parents and allowable-for-dentists, no evils are allowable-for-God. And the reason comes from another premise of our argument.

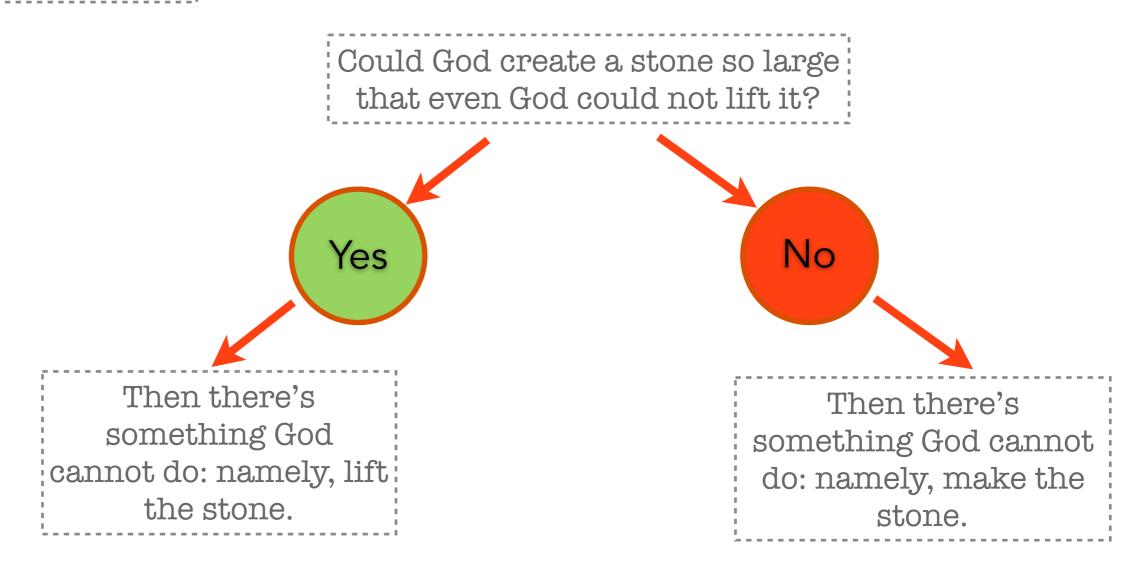
3. If something is omnipotent, it can do anything.

If (3) is true, then God can do anything. But then for any good and evil, God can bring abut the good without the evil. But then it follows that every evil is forbidden-for-God. Since some evil does exist, some forbidden-for-God evil exists, and (11*) is true.

The best move here for someone objecting to Mackie's argument is to say that, contra (3), God cannot do anything. And indeed that is the moral of a very old paradox.

3. If something is omnipotent, it can do anything.

Consider the following question:



Either way, there is something that God cannot do.

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Does this 'paradox of the stone' show that God is not omnipotent?

Many have thought that it does not, and that instead it shows that premise (3) gives the wrong account of omnipotence. Aquinas was one of these, and gave us the following argument against the view of omnipotence given by (3):

It is possible that at omnipotent being exists. If (3) is true, then that omnipotent being could do anything. So, if (3) is true, that omnipotent being could make a square circle. So, if (3) is true, it is possible that there could be a square circle. But of course this is not possible. So (3) is false.

But then what could omnipotence be?

Aquinas suggested:

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11*. Some forbiddenfor-God evil exists. Why does the difference between (3) and (3') matter? Remember that we imagined the proponent of Mackie's argument wanting to reject (11*).

Mackie's objection to that move was to say that, since God can do anything, any evil is a forbidden-for-God evil — since God could always bring about the outweighing good without that evil.

But now we are saying that God can bring about anything possible. And maybe some goods are such that it is impossible for them to exist without the corresponding evil. And, if that is the case, that evil would be allowed-for-God. If every evil is like this, then (11*) is false.

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- 5. If God exists, then God is wholly good.
- 6*. If something is wholly good, it always eliminates as much evil which is forbidden-for-it as it can.
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Let's now see how our argument looks if we sub in (3') for (3).

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But now the argument is invalid. Can you see why?

Let's fix it.

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Now (4) follows from (2) and (3').

But does (8*) follow from (4) and (7*)?

This is a little tricky. You might think: 'No, because some forbidden-for-God evils might be impossible to eliminate.' But that would forget the definition of a forbidden-for-God evil, which requires that it be possible for God to bring about the corresponding good without the evil. So it looks like our argument is valid.

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The resulting argument is cumbersome, but powerful.

As with previous versions of the argument, it looks like anyone who wants to avoid the reductio without rejecting (1) must reject one of three premises: (3'), (6*), and (11').

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In the reading for today, we encountered one attempt to do just that: the free will defense.

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The free will defense

Because free will is a good, a wholly good being might wish for others to have free will. But it is impossible to both give free will to creatures and stop them from using that free will to do evil. (To do the latter would be to take away, to that extent, their free will.) Hence a wholly good creature might well not eliminate evil which it was within its power to eliminate, when doing so would be an infringement on the free will of the creature causing the evil.

Which of the premises at left might the free will defense be designed to falsify?

11*. Some forbidden-for-God evil exists.

If it is to be relevant to Mackie's argument, it looks like the free will defense will have to falsify (11*). The free will defense so construed is open to two sorts of objections.

Some but not all evil is redeemed by free will

No evil at all is redeemed by free will

Mackie thinks that the free will defense is a complete failure: it explains no evil at all.

Here's what Mackie says about the free will defense:

"if God has made men such that in their free choices they sometimes prefer what is good and sometimes what is evil, why could he not have made men such that they always freely choose the good? If there is no logical impossibility in a man's freely choosing the good on one, or several occasions, there cannot be a logical impossibility in his freely choosing the good on every occasion. God was not, then, faced with a choice between making innocent automata and making beings who, in acting freely, would sometimes go wrong: there was open to him the obviously better possibility of making beings who would act freely but always go right."

It is key to the free will defense that it is impossible for God to give us the good of free will without also letting into the universe the evil we cause with that free will.

Mackie is giving us an argument against that assumption.

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It is possible for all people to have free will and yet never bring about any evil.

God can bring about any possible situation.

God could have made a world where all people have free will and yet never bring about any evil.

- 1. It is possible for all people to have free will and yet never bring about any evil.
- 2. God can bring about any possible situation.
- C. God could have made a world where all people have free will and yet never bring about any evil. (1,2)

If the conclusion of this argument is true, then evil caused by human free will is forbidden-for-God — which is enough to make (11*) true.

11*. Some forbidden-for-God evil exists.

How should the proponent of the free will defense respond to this argument?

- 1. It is possible for all people to have free will and yet never bring about any evil.
- 2. God can bring about any possible situation.
- C. God could have made a world where all people have free will and yet never bring about any evil. (1,2)

Most people are initially inclined to reject premise (1).

But this faces some challenges.

First, God is free and yet never brings about any evil; so why should it be impossible to be free and never bring about any evil?

Second, many think that God wants us never to bring about any evil. Is God then wishing for something impossible?

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Suppose that we reject (2). This raises the question: what is omnipotence, if not the ability to bring about anything possible?

One might try:

A being is omnipotent if it can do anything that it is possible for that being to do.

But this seems too weak.

- 1. It is possible for all people to have free will and yet never bring about any evil.
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We could try instead:

A being is omnipotent if it can do anything that it is possible for any being to do.

But this definition seems too strong. Consider the action 'Jeff Speaks freely eating a hamburger for lunch.' I can bring this about — but God cannot.

- 1. It is possible for all people to have free will and yet never bring about any evil.
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Perhaps we could go for:

A being is omnipotent if and only if that being is maximally powerful—
i.e., is such that it is not possible for any being to be more powerful than it.

Does this help?

Suppose that we can block Mackie's argument by revising our view of God's omnipotence.

One might think that a problem remains. There's a different way in which God could have given us free will while preventing the evil to which it actually gives rise: God could have only ever given us choices between alternative actions which lead to no evil. Suppose, for example, that we only ever had choices between different flavors of jelly beans.

Doesn't this possibility deliver the conclusion of Mackie's argument by itself, without the help of any assumptions about omnipotence?

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- 2. God can bring about any possible situation.
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Here's what Richard Swinburne says about this:

It is good that the free choices of humans should include genuine responsibility for other humans, and that involves the opportunity to benefit or harm them. God has the power to benefit or to harm humans. If other agents are to be given a share in his creative work, it is good that they have that power too (although perhaps to a lesser degree). A world in which agents can benefit each other but not do each other harm is one where they have only very limited responsibility for each other. If my responsibility for you is limited to whether or not to give you a camcorder, but I cannot cause you pain, stunt your growth, or limit your education, then I do not have a great deal of responsibility for you. A God who gave agents only such limited responsibilities for their fellows would not have given much. God would have reserved for himself the all-important choice of the kind of world it was to be, while simply allowing humans the minor choice of filling in the details.

If he is right, the "free will defense" should be called the "free will and genuine responsibility defense."

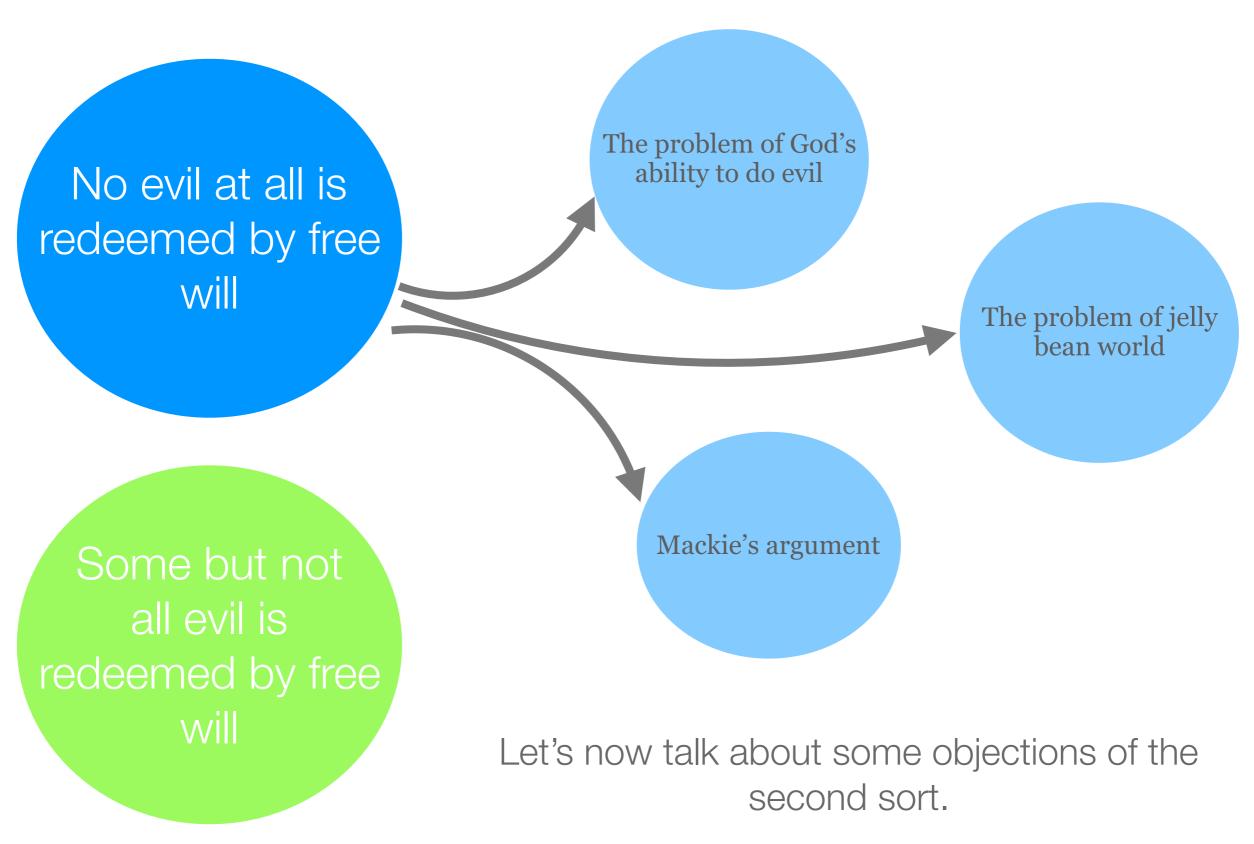
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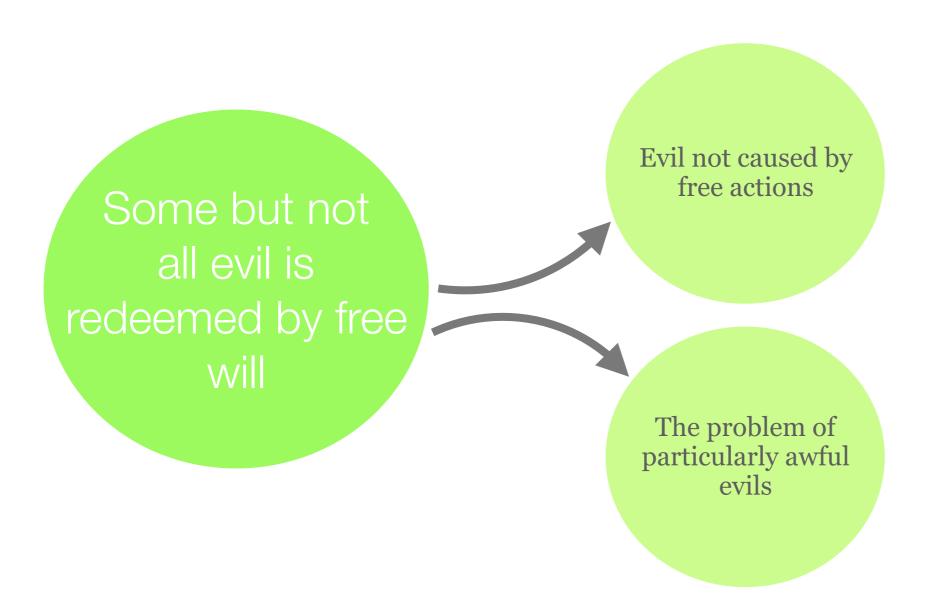
But this addition to the free will defense gives rise to a puzzle. One way to bring out the puzzle is to ask: Can God do evil?

The standard answer to this question is that God cannot; that God is not just good, but **necessarily** good.

But suppose that this is right. This makes it somewhat mysterious why it should be so important that we have the ability to bring about evil. If God does not have this ability, and God is morally perfect, why should it be so important for us to have this ability? And it must be **very** important, given the amount of suffering which it has caused.

Above I mentioned two different sorts of resistance to the free will defense:







Evil not caused by free actions is sometimes called 'natural evil.' Suppose that there is some natural evil which it is possible to eliminate, and which is not outweighed by any good. That would seem to show that, no matter what the free will defender says, premise (11') is true:

11'. Some unredeemed evil exists that it is possible to eliminate.

One of the main responses to this problem is to argue that many things which seem to be natural evil are in fact the results of free choices.

One version of this strategy is suggested by the contemporary philosopher Alvin Plantinga:

a more

traditional line of thought is indicated by St. Augustine, who attributes much of the evil we find to *Satan* or to Satan and his cohorts. Satan, so the traditional doctrine goes, is a mighty nonhuman spirit who, along with many other angels, was created long before God created man. Unlike most of his colleagues, Satan rebelled against God and has since been wreaking whatever havoc he can. The result is natural evil. So the natural evil we find is due to free actions of nonhuman spirits.

On this sort of view, all evil is caused by the free actions of something. Plantinga doesn't claim to know that this is the correct explanation for the evil not caused by human free actions; but he does think that we have no particular reason to doubt that it is true.

There is, however, another way in which one might try to explain the evil caused by natural disasters and the like using the free will defense, which is proposed by Peter van Inwagen in the reading for today. van Inwagen explains, in more depth, a story with the following features:

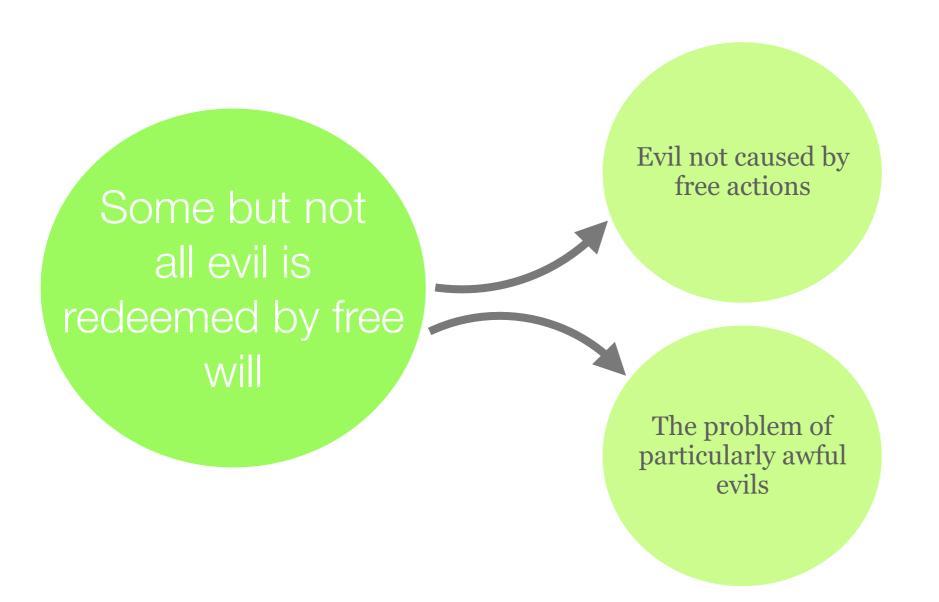
Though earthquakes and the like are not caused by human free actions, our inability to avoid the harm caused by them is. In particular, the event of human beings removing themselves from the care of God - an event symbolized in the Judaeo-Christian tradition by the story of the Garden of Eden - placed human beings in a world in which they were subject to natural forces which they were then unable to avoid.

van Inwagen's story capitalizes on the fact that natural disasters don't seem to be evil as such, but only evil insofar as they bring about suffering. Hence, if the suffering caused by natural disasters can be explained as the result of human free choice, we will have successfully explained all that needs explaining.

It is worth noting that van Inwagen's story cannot explain every sort of natural evil. A particularly troublesome case is the case of animal suffering before the existence of human beings; William Rowe gives the following example:

"Suppose that in some distant forest lightning strikes a dead tree, resulting in a forest fire. In the fire a fawn is trapped, horribly burned, and lies in terrible agony for several days before death relieves its suffering. ... So far as we can see, the fawn's intense suffering is pointless. For there does not appear to be any greater good such that the prevention of the fawn's suffering would require either the loss of that good or the occurrence of an evil equally bad or worse."

van Inwagen does respond to this sort of case, though not in the reading for today.



Let's turn now to the problem of particularly awful evils, which van Inwagen calls 'horrors.'



In today's reading, van Inwagen considers the following sort of argument against God's existence, which is related to but not the same as Mackie's.

Together, these premises entail that there is no perfectly good and omnipotent being. Which, if any, of these premises could be rejected?

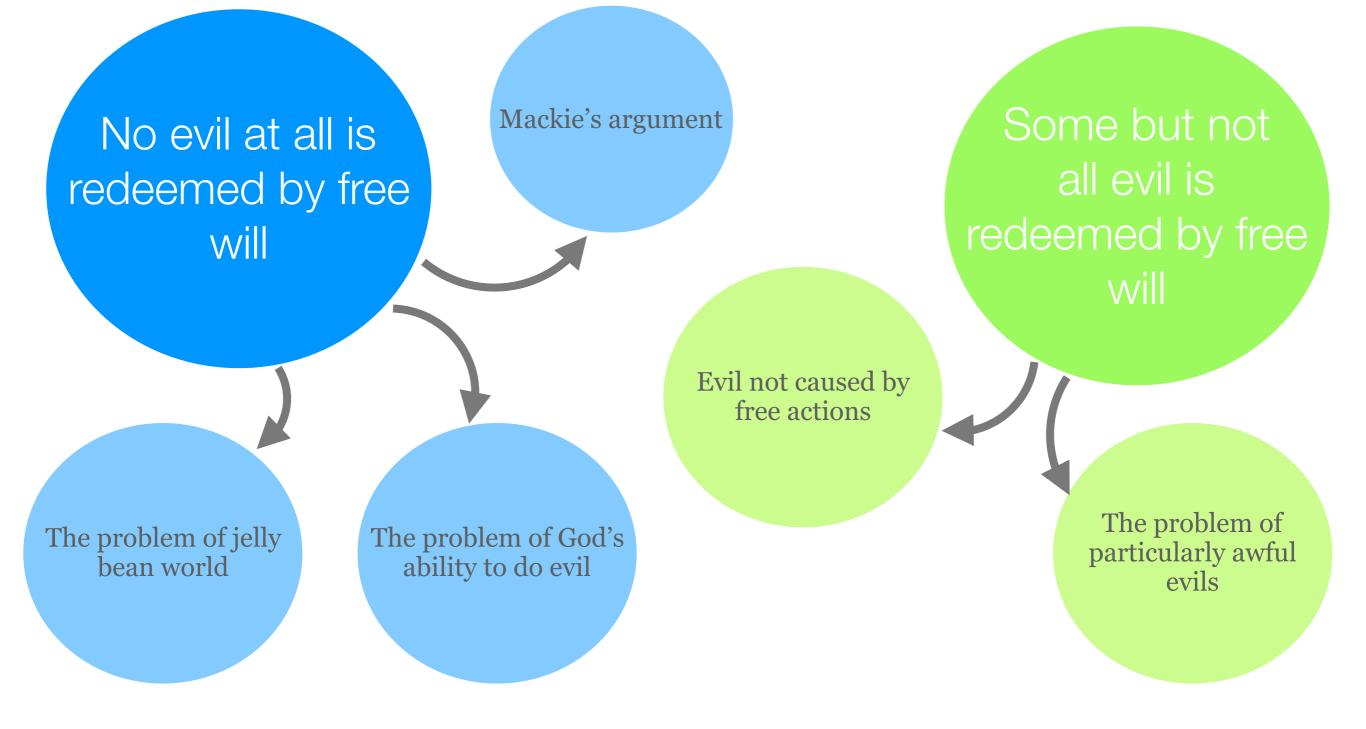
- 1. The world contains horrors.
- 2. Some horrors are such that the world would be no worse if it did not contain that horror.
- 3. If a perfectly good being could omit a horror from the world without making the world any worse, he would.
- 4. An omnipotent being could omit some of the relevant horrors from the world.

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van Inwagen suggests that we reject (3). This premise, he thinks, only seems plausible insofar as we accept some general claim like

If one is in a position to prevent an evil without causing any more harm or preventing any good, one should do it.

But van Inwagen argues that this principle is false, using the example of prison sentences. Is his argument convincing?



We've now discussed the main challenges to the free will defense, which is the most important response to the argument from evil. The question you should ask yourself is: can these challenges be withstood? Can free will explain the existence of evil in the world?