The Failure of Type-4 Arguments from Evil, in the Face of the Consequential Complexity of History

by Kirk K. Durston

Abstract: Bruce Russell has classified evidential arguments from evil into four types, one of which is the type-4 argument. Rather than begin with observations of evils *that appear to be gratuitous*, type-4 arguments simply begin with observations of evils. The next step, and the heart of a type-4 argument, is an abductive inference (inference to the best explanation) from those observations, to the conclusion that there is gratuitous evil. Reflection upon the consequential complexity of history, however, reveals that we have no objective grounds for making the key, abductive inference, thus, all type-4 arguments from evil fail.

Tires were exploding all over the place.
That poor girl was screaming,
God, it must have been for ten minutes.
We just couldn't help her.
　　　　　eyewitness, multi-vehicle inferno, Hwy 401

In the instance of suffering described in the above prelude, the girl's heart-rending screams for help as she was slowly incinerated would have, and did, move anyone with even a shred of compassion to do everything in their power to save her. If there is an omnipotent, omniscient and morally perfect being, surely such a being should have been moved to intervene when all human efforts failed. Such an intervention never occurred. The best explanation for the lack of a theistic rescue, some would argue, is that such a being does not exist.

　　　　Bruce Russell has classified evidential arguments from evil into four major types.[1] I have dealt elsewhere with the effect of the consequential complexity of history upon type-1 and type-2 arguments.[2] Russell indicates that there is no known example of a type-3 argument. Thus, this paper shall focus only on type-4 arguments. By Russell's taxonomy, the sort of argument from evil given in the previous paragraph would classify as a type-4 evidential argument from evil. In this paper I shall argue that the complexity of history, with it's innumerable, interacting causal chains, puts us in a position of such ignorance, that type-4 arguments are neutralized. I will begin with a review of Russell's explanation of the type-4 argument. Following this, I will examine the consequential complexity of history and its effect on type-4 arguments. Finally, I will look at some possible objections to the counter-argument I lay out in this paper.

TYPE-4 ARGUMENTS

Gratuitous evil is usually defined as an evil which God could have prevented without forfeiting a greater good or permitting another evil as bad or worse than the instance of evil in question. The existence of gratuitous evil, in discussions of the problem of evil, is generally accepted to entail the non-existence of God. According to Russell, all type-4 arguments begin with "suffering itself" or "our observations of that suffering."[3] Unlike type-1 and type-2 arguments, which he discusses in the same paper and which begin with observations of evil that appear to be gratuitous, there is no initial assumption that the suffering being observed appears to be gratuitous in type-4 arguments. Possible explanations for the observed suffering are then considered. An abductive inference, which Russell defines as "an inference to the best explanation,"[4] is then made to the conclusion that the best explanation for such evil, or our observations of such evil, is that there is no explanation, which is equivalent to it being gratuitous. Since gratuitous evil entails the non-existence of God, it is concluded that there is no God.

The work in type-4 arguments centers around the task of establishing what constitutes the best explanation. Russell states that "it is very difficult to specify in any detail what makes one explanation better than another" although the relative superiority of one explanation over another must be an "objective matter."[5] This difficulty presents a problem. If it is hard to specify exactly why one explanation is better than another, then type-4 arguments present an ill-defined target for those wishing to challenge them. Fortunately, in the same paper, Russell supplies a type-4 argument, which I will take as a paradigm from which a general form can be derived.[6] Once this general form is described, a general response to type-4 arguments can then be offered.

Russell begins his argument by letting e = a proposition that describes in some detail the amount, kinds, and distribution of suffering of all sentient creatures, past and present. Representing theism is T, the hypothesis that there exists an omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect person who created the universe. HI represents the *hypothesis of indifference*, the hypothesis that neither the nature nor the condition of sentient beings on earth is the result of benevolent or malevolent actions performed by non-human persons. Since evidential arguments focus on the existence of God rather than, say, extraterrestrials, I will take the term 'non-human' to refer to supernatural beings. The argument then centers around the question of whether the probability of HI, given e, is greater than the probability of T, given e, where,

$$P(HI/e) = \frac{P(HI) \times P(e/HI)}{P(e)}$$

$$P(T/e) = \frac{P(T) \times P(e/T)}{P(e)}.$$

Russell states that the use of Bayes's theorem in this way 'allows one

to see clearly all the relevant factors that go into judging whether theism or atheism best explains the evil we see.'[7] Given this statement by the person responsible for the definition of type-4 arguments, the earlier difficulty in specifying why one explanation is superior to the other, has been largely overcome, at least to the extent of giving us something more or less measurable to work with.

So as not to weigh the scales in favor of either option, Russell assumes that T is just as likely as HI on our background knowledge; in other words, $P(T) = P(HI) = 0.5$. Given that e is a proposition that summarizes our observations (where we will take 'observations' to refer to events recorded through any of our five senses) of the actual world, e can be taken as true; therefore, $P(e) = 1$. With these two moves in mind, we can simplify the above two probability formulae as follows:

$P(HI/e) = 0.5 \times P(e/HI)$

$P(T/e) = 0.5 \times P(e/T)$.

It requires only a small move to derive a general form for type-4 arguments by letting e represent a proposition describing observations of instances, amounts, types or patterns of suffering used in *any* type-4 argument. Also, since HI is only a special case of -T (if HI is the case, then -T is the case), we can exchange HI for the more general -T. With this in mind, the above two equations reduce to

$P(-T/e) = 0.5 \times P(e/-T)$

$P(T/e) = 0.5 \times P(e/T)$

and discussions of type-4 evidential arguments from evil, reduce to defending one of the following three options:

1. $P(e/-T) > P(e/T)$
2. $P(e/-T) < P(e/T)$
3. $P(e/-T) = P(e/T)$

As we shall see momentarily, the sort of probability Russell is referring to is epistemic *conditional* probability, the epistemic probability of one proposition on another. [8] Since this type of probability is epistemic, rather than mathematical, option (3) is equivalent to a state of agnosticism regarding the relative epistemic probabilities $P(e/-T)$ and $P(e/T)$. Given this, option (1) represents atheism, option (2) represents theism, and option (3) represents agnosticism. I will argue that, given the consequential complexity of history, agnosticism (option (3)), is the most rational position to hold.

Persons, such as Russell, who wish to defend type-4 arguments must argue in favor of option (1). In Russell's example of a type-4 argument he argues that

> … it seems nearly certain on what we know that a world just like this one but with one less instance of terrible suffering would be so much better morally than this world that a wholly good being would be morally required to bring it about if he knew about it and was able to.[9]

This proposition is so compelling that option (1) seems eminently more likely than option (2). It is this proposition that does the work in Russell's type-4 argument. The phrase, "it seems nearly certain on what we know" indicates that Russell is concerned with epistemic conditional probability, as I have already pointed out. With this in mind, I would propose the following, more general proposition, that would do the work in all type-4 arguments.

> B: It is likely *on what we know* that a world just like this one, but with one less instance of e, would be so much better morally than this world, that a wholly good being would be morally required to bring it about if he know about it and was able to.

B makes a slightly weaker claim than Russell's proposition, exchanging 'nearly certain' for 'is likely', which should make it easier to defend and even more compelling. It should also be evident that if B is false, then so would Russell's stronger claim.

A person wishing to defeat Russell's type-4 argument must argue for either option (2) or (3), or defeat option (1) by showing that B is false. One approach, as Peter van Inwagen suggests, is to advance a theodicy, the conjunction T with an *auxiliary hypothesis* h that attempts to explain how e could be true, given theism.[10] Two conditions must be satisfied:

1. $P(e/T\&h)$ must be equal to or greater than $P(e/-T)$
2. $P(h/T)$ must be high enough to be plausible

If both of these conditions can be satisfied, then option (1) can be defeated and type-4 evidential arguments from evil fail.

A possible response to B can be stated as follows:

> h: The consequential complexity of history is such that B is false.

If h is granted then we are no longer in a position to justify rationally the conclusion that events described by e are more, or less, likely under theism. The rational justification for options (1) and (2) disappears, type-4 arguments from evil collapse, and option (3) becomes the most rational position to hold. Thus, this particular h does not favor theism (2), but is still a defeater for type-4 arguments since we are left in a position of agnosticism regarding God's existence. To move from agnosticism to theism, the theist would have to introduce additional propositions, in conjunction with T and h.[11] In the next section I shall argue that reflection upon the consequential complexity of history shows that h is true and, therefore, type-4 arguments from evil collapse.

Since my argument will be contingent upon free agency, I will make three assumptions that arise out of Alvin Plantinga's Free Will Defense and that are commonly granted in discussions of the problem of evil. The *first assumption* is that this world contains free agents who can make decisions that are not determined by any antecedent conditions and who, for any decision, could have decided otherwise. The *second assumption* is that it is possible that there might be some restrictions on just how much evil God can prevent in the process of achieving a greater good. According to Plantinga,

> The heart of the Free Will Defense is the claim that it is possible that God could not have created a universe containing moral good (or as much moral good as this one contains) without creating one containing moral evil.[12]

If we are to grant that possibility, then we must grant the second assumption. The *third assumption* is closely related to the second. It is the assumption that there may be worlds containing moral good that God cannot actualize. This is because "the actualization of a world W containing moral good is not up to God alone; it also depends upon what the significantly free creatures of W would do if God created them and placed them in the situations W contains.'[13] We are now ready to proceed.

THE COMPLEXITY OF HISTORY AND h

During the first part of World War II, Sir Winston Churchill made a number of decisions that had a very significant impact upon the evolution of the war, directly affecting the lives of millions of people at the time, and indirectly affecting the lives of most of the world's population today. If on the night that Sir Winston Churchill was conceived, Lady Randolf Churchill had fallen asleep in a slightly different position from the one she actually took, then the slight difference in the arrangement of her internal organs and the ensuing altered paths of the millions of spermatozoa involved in that event would have virtually guaranteed a different chromosomal combination, with the result that Sir Winston Churchill, as we knew him, would not have existed.

In the above account, we have an illustration of how a seemingly trivial event with no immediate moral significance (a sleeping position) led to events of great moral significance more than half a century later. The consequences of Lady Randolf's sleeping position continue to expand to this day, affecting billions of causal chains. For any event of great moral significance that occurs in history, one can easily work backward in time to innumerable trivial events that, at the time they occurred, would have seemed utterly devoid of any moral significance, but in retrospect proved to be historically necessary for the later events of great moral significance.

History[14] is composed of multiple billions of interacting causal chains, each of which is composed of thousands, millions, or more events. Since events that occur in history appear to lead to exponentially increasing numbers of consequences, affecting an increasing number of interacting causal chains, in contemplating each event included in e, we must also consider the consequences of that event to the end of history. As we have

just seen in the Churchill case, even morally insignificant consequences must be followed up to see if they lead to events of great moral significance decades, centuries, or millennia later.

It is generally agreed that gratuitous evil is evil which God could have prevented without forfeiting some greater good or permitting some evil as bad or worse. In order to know what will be forfeit, or what will be permitted, this notion entails that God must consider not only the events described by e, but all their consequences to the end of history. Also entailed is the requirement that God take into consideration all other possible worlds where those events do not occur. When we contemplate the consequential complexity of history, with its myriad of interacting causal chains, with consequences increasing exponentially for any event, it is evident that a substantial amount of knowledge is required. Knowledge of only the innumerable actual consequences to the end of history is not sufficient. Also required is knowledge of all possible alternatives that could be actualized, with the three assumptions at the end of the previous section in mind. This requires *middle knowledge*, commonly understood as knowledge of what every possible free creature would do under any possible circumstances. With this in mind, in contemplating whether or not the events described by e are events which are likely to be gratuitous, that is, whether $P(e/\!-T) > P(e/T)$, we must have sufficient knowledge of an impressive amount of data. We do not need to have knowledge of all the data, only sufficient knowledge to justify rationally the abductive conclusion that the events described by e are likely gratuitous and, therefore, it is likely that God does not exist. We will now consider whether or not proposition B is false.

First, it is logically impossible to delete an event from history without deleting all its consequences to the end of history. Necessarily, a world just like this one, but with one less instance of suffering, would also be missing all the consequences of that deleted event to the end of future history. With this in mind, the two bodies of information which we need to know in order to determine whether or not deleting just one instance of suffering from history would produce a morally better world, can be summarized as follows:

a) the instance of evil and its morally significant consequences to the end of history;
b) the morally significant consequences, to the end of a modified history, of substituting that instance of evil for some other event.[15]

If type-4 conclusions are to be an objective matter then they must be based upon the above two bodies of information. Failure to consider these two sets of data is to leave the realm of objectivity, for it is these two sets of data that ultimately determine whether deletion of that event could be done without bringing about a greater evil or preventing a greater good. Let us first consider the complex problem of evaluating the data contained in (a) and then the problem of evaluating the data in (b). We shall then look at the implications these problems have for B and h.

If we are contemplating whether or not deleting just one instance of

suffering would result in a morally better world, we must first concern ourselves with the data described by (a). What we are interested in is the net moral value of the branch of actual history containing the event with all its consequences to the end of history. This net moral value, which I shall refer to as 'v', is the sum of the intrinsic values of the actual event and each of its consequences to the end of history. For the purpose of calculation, we can assign intrinsic values to the consequences (c_1, c_2, …) that are indexed to whatever value we assigned to the initial event e_1, where e_1 is a member of e. The sum of these values, both negative and positive, yields the overall net moral value of the actual event as follows:

$$v = e_1 + c_1 + c_2 + c_3 + … c_n$$

The value of v is not sufficient, however, for we must also know if there was a better alternative that God could have actualized, described by the data contained in (b). There may be a number of options, but the one that we are interested in is the best alternative that could be actualized. This would allow us to compare the best alternative to actual history to see which has the greater overall moral value (involves the least net suffering or the greatest net good). The calculation of b is similar to v, except that we substitute the intrinsic value of some alternative event s for the intrinsic value of the actual evil event e_1 as follows:

$$b = s + c_{b1} + c_{b2} + c_{b3} + … c_{bn}$$

Note that the consequences of s are not assumed, or even likely, to be the same as the consequences of e_1. Also, s can represent the deletion of the actual event e_1. Of course, that deletion will have a different set of consequences as noted in the calculation of b. Events that were prevented in the actual world by the consequences of e_1 may occur if e_1 does not take place.

Once we have calculated the values of v and b we can take the difference between the two values to determine if the net moral value, v, of the actual event is greater that the net moral value, b, of the best alternative that God could have actualized. If the difference is negative, then the net moral value of the best alternative was greater than the net moral value of the actual event and the event was gratuitous. If the difference is positive, then the actual event was the best option that God could have brought about. In that case, even if v is negative, b would be even more negative.

Recall that, according to Russell, the choice of one explanation over another in type-4 arguments must be an objective matter. It is the complete set of data necessary for calculating v and b that forms the objective grounds for determining whether or not the event he wishes to delete from history in b is gratuitous. Therefore, type-4 conclusions must be based upon this data. The utility of defining gratuitous evil in terms of the difference, v-b, is that it forces us to concentrate on the objective basis for making the abductive inference, thereby satisfying Russell's requirement that the inference be an objective matter.

There is a problem in calculating v for worlds that contain a large number of free agents who make decisions that are not determined by any antecedent conditions. Since each event produces an exponentially increasing number of consequences, affecting an increasing number of interacting causal chains, for any event the actual consequences that we have knowledge of pales into insignificance in comparison to the innumerable consequences to the end of history that we have no knowledge of. Thus, the value of v, and whether or not it is positive or negative, is essentially an unknown. By way of illustration, let us suppose that a particular event described by e_1 has an assigned intrinsic value of -9 (on a scale of -10 to 10). Let us also suppose that we have knowledge of a few hundred consequences which have various intrinsic values within the range specified. v would then be calculated as follows:

v = -9 + (a few hundred known negative and positive numbers) +
    millions (or billions) of additional unknown numbers of unknown sign

However extensive our knowledge of the consequences of an event might be, it will be miniscule in comparison to what we do not know -- the remaining innumerable consequences in countless causal chains stretching to the end of future history. When faced with evaluating v, we are left with choosing between three positions to defend:

a) v is negative
b) v is positive
c) we do not know if v is positive or negative

Given the consequential complexity of history and our miniscule grasp of the data needed to calculate v, it should be readily apparent that the most rational position to defend is (c), we do not know if v is positive or negative.

Our problem in calculating b is even more daunting. The problem in calculating v also applies to b but with an additional twist. Recall the third assumption stated in the first section: there may be worlds containing moral good that God cannot actualize. Although we may be able to imagine any number of worlds containing free agents that are better than this one, since we do not have middle knowledge we do not know which worlds God can bring about (which possible worlds can be actualized). The possible free agents in some worlds may not cooperate to co-actualize that world. Therefore, our knowledge of the consequences of any proposed change is virtually non-existent if free agents are involved. It is only possible worlds that God could actually bring about that are relevant in discussions of whether an event is gratuitous. Thus, we are left in an even greater state of ignorance in calculating b then we are for v.

For any event described by e_1, the problem in calculating v-b is similar to the following arithmetic problem, where e_1, with an intrinsic value of -7, has been substituted for a positive event of intrinsic value 4:

Given: v = -7 + (a few hundred known negative or positive numbers)
        + millions of unknown numbers of unknown sign
        b = 4 + millions of additional unknown numbers of unknown
        sign
Question: Is v-b positive or negative?

In the above arithmetic question, there are three positions one could take:

1) v-b is positive
2) v-b is negative
3) agnosticism regarding the sign of v-b

   Type-4 arguments, and B, hold that (2) is likely true on objective grounds. That is, it is more likely *on what we know* that v-b is negative than it is positive and, therefore, it is more likely that e_1 is gratuitous and God does not exist. Contemplation of the consequential complexity of history, however, should make it evident that (3) is the most rational position to defend, not (2). What we know is far too miniscule to move us from (3) to (2). If agnosticism is the most rationally defensible position to take regarding the sign of v-b, then assumption B is false. The Achilles heel of B is 'on what we know'. What we know is far too miniscule to justify rationally the assumption that a world just like this one, but with one less instance of e, would be better morally, for our knowledge of deleting the consequences of e is virtually non-existent in comparison to how much data the consequential complexity of history demands.

   Now let us consider the rational justification for granting h. Let us imagine two possible worlds that are similar to ours in that they both contain billions of free agents and the balance of good and evil events is such that the inhabitants are left debating whether or not gratuitous evil exists. However, unbeknownst to the inhabitants, one world, W1, actually contains gratuitous evil and the other world, W2, contains no gratuitous evil.

   If the inhabitants of both worlds had complete knowledge of the objective grounds for determining v-b for any event, then we would expect that there would be a perfect correspondence between whether or not an evil was actually gratuitous and whether or not the inhabitants concluded, on objective grounds, that it was gratuitous. The inhabitants of W1 would conclude that certain evils were gratuitous and they would be right. The inhabitants of W2 would conclude that there was no gratuitous evil in their world and they would be right also.

   If the inhabitants of both worlds were missing only a small amount of knowledge necessary to calculate v-b for any event, then we should expect the possibility of error creeping in. There may be the occasional case in both worlds where the inhabitants reached false conclusions regarding whether or not v-b was positive. The inhabitants of W1 would occasionally conclude that some events were gratuitous when in fact they were not and other events were not gratuitous when they actually were. The inhabitants of W2 would conclude, albeit rarely, that some events were gratuitous even though there was no gratuitous evil in W2. Since the inhabitants of both worlds would be

missing only a minute amount of data, however, we should expect a very close relationship between their conclusions and whether or not events were actually gratuitous. Mistakes would be relatively rare. In this scenario, B would be easily granted. As their knowledge of the objective grounds for making type-4 decisions decreased, we would expect the inhabitants of W1 and W2 to more frequently come to false conclusions. For the people of W1, since their knowledge of the objective grounds for making accurate conclusions was diminishing with increasing ignorance, there would be more events they might classify as justified when, in fact, they were gratuitous, and vice versa. For the citizens of W2, we would expect that as their knowledge of the data forming the objective grounds for drawing conclusions decreased, they would draw an increasing number of false conclusions as well. In their world, since all events are actually justified, being mistaken would entail that an increasing number of events would appear to be of the sort for which the best explanation, so far as the inhabitants could see, is that they are gratuitous.

Eventually, as the amount of missing data increased, a point would be reached where their knowledge of the objective grounds for drawing conclusions about the sign of v-b was so lacking, inhabitants of those worlds would just as likely be right as wrong in their conclusions; there would simply be too much missing data. The inhabitants might as well flip a coin to decide whether or not an event was gratuitous. At this point their most defensible position would be agnosticism regarding whether or not there was gratuitous evil. Their ignorance of the data would be such that they would no longer have sufficient knowledge of the objective grounds to defend a positive or negative conclusion. Once there was no longer any relationship at all between the inhabitants' conclusions and whether or not an event was actually gratuitous, then both worlds would appear to be similar, composed of a random mixture of instances, amounts, types or patterns of suffering, some for which the best explanation, so far as they could see, was that gratuitous evil exists. They might just as likely be right as wrong in inferring that gratuitous evil exists. At that point, B would become false, h would become true, and the first condition for h would be met,

$$P(e/T\&h) = P(e/-T)$$

In worlds containing billions of free agents and with a future that is ongoing, the consequential complexity of history prevents us from having anything but an absurdly small sampling of the entire body of data for any event. Given this state of affairs, it appears that we are well past the point beyond which we might just as likely be right as wrong regarding the value of v-b for any event. If we examine a larger number of events, say all those instances of suffering described by e, we are left with a larger number of enigmas. Each member of that infamous set would still have a v-b represented by an unknown number of unknown sign, thanks to our insufficient knowledge of the entire set of relevant data. The sum of a quantity of unknown numbers of unknown sign gives us yet another unknown number of unknown sign. This leaves us in a position where we might just as likely be right as wrong regarding whether that unknown number is positive or negative for any evil described by e and even the entire set of evils described by e.

When we consider the consequential complexity of history, our lack of middle knowledge and our lack of knowledge of all the consequences for any event to the end of histories, both actual and possible, the most rational position to hold and defend is that h is true and B is false. If it can be granted that h is likely to be true for any world that contains billions of free agents active over long periods of time, whether or not God exists, then for those sorts of worlds of which ours is a member, P(h/T) is very high, if not equal to 1. This satisfies van Inwagen's second condition for a plausible h.

Contemplation of the consequential complexity of history reveals that our knowledge of all the consequences of any event, or set of events, and possible alternatives that God could have actualized, along with all their consequences to the end of any alternate history, is truly miniscule. That being the case, proposition B is false, h is true, option (3) is the most rationally defensible position to hold, option (1) fails, and type-4 arguments from evil collapse into agnosticism. Our knowledge of the data does not provide sufficient grounds for concluding that one explanation is better, or more likely, than the other and we have no idea whether a world just like this one, but with one less instance of suffering, would be even marginally better than the actual world.

SOME OBJECTIONS

Perhaps the four most potentially significant objections to the counter-argument I have presented in this paper are as follows:

1. It is difficult to believe that a fawn that has lived a quiet and solitary life far from civilization and endures a lingering death due to burns suffered in a forest fire, would produce any consequences that had any moral significance somewhere in future history. It seems more plausible to hold that a world just like this one, yet without this particular fawn's suffering, would be better morally and no morally significant consequences would likely need to be considered.

2. One of the difficulties in estimating the ultimate net value of any event is that the consequences of each event continue to propagate to the end of future history. However, could it be possible that the consequences of some events are eventually damped out just as ripples from a stone dropped into a pond become lower in amplitude as their distance from the source increases. Similarly, perhaps the consequences from some events cancel out the consequences from other events.

3. We do not have middle knowledge, thus we cannot know which possible worlds God can actualize, making our knowledge of the data for calculating B virtually non-existent. We can, however, imagine a great number of better worlds containing free agents. It seems unlikely that God could not actualize any of them. We have good reason to believe, therefore, that there is a better world that God should have brought about if he existed.

4. There are certain massive evils that have occurred in history such as

the Black Death and the Holocaust. These massive evils begin with such a huge negative moral deficit that surely, in these cases, the best explanation is that they are gratuitous.

I have dealt with objections (3) and (4) elsewhere, in my response to type-1 and type-2 evidential arguments from evil.[16] Thus, I shall focus only on objections (1) and (2).

There are two problems with the first objection. The first problem is that it fails to appreciate the significance of the consequential complexity of history. Most, if not all, events of moral significance were preceded by innumerable past events that were, upon retrospection, historically necessary for the later, morally significant events. Many of those innumerable events may have occurred at a time or location remote from civilization and at the outset, appeared to have only highly localized and insignificant consequences. It is logically possible that a given event occurring today, isolated from civilization, will not have any consequences of significance to humanity. Thus, God could freely intervene in such events without the restrictions imposed by the three free will assumptions laid out at the end of Part A. Of course, it is possible that the opposite could be true as well. The question we face when considering a suffering fawn in the remote wilderness is whether this is one of those logically possible events that never does have consequences affecting free agents, or whether this is one of those events that is historically necessary for future events of great moral significance. The complexity of history makes it impossible to know, leaving us in a position of agnosticism and type-4 arguments still fail. A response to this is that, since the fawn suffers in a remote location, unobserved by human free agents, God could intervene, delete the suffering, but still ensure that before the point where the consequences of the suffering fawn began to interact with causal chains involving human free agents, the identical set of events are created as if there had actually been a suffering fawn, thereby avoiding the restrictions imposed by the three free will assumptions laid out at the end of Part A. Of course, it would be impossible for us to tell if such intervention does or does not occur and, once again, we are left in a state of agnosticism.

The second problem with this first objection is more devastating. The four types of evidential arguments from evil are referred to as 'evidential' because they are concerned with evil events that *we actually have knowledge of*. We are not concerned about hypothetical events that, for all we know, will never occur. For example, we are not concerned about *hypothetical* instances of a fawn trapped in a forest fire and undergoing several days of terrible agony before death. For all we know God does not permit any such events, as William Rowe and others seem to expect.[17] Mere logical possibility of certain evils does not provide grounds for evidential arguments from evil. We are only concerned about those suffering fawns that we actually have knowledge of through observations or compelling evidence. Of course burnt fawns that we actually have knowledge of have consequences that *do* affect human free agents. For example, if Rowe's famous burnt fawn example is actually drawn from a known instance, then it cannot be disputed that the consequences of that event have already affected thousands of people as they have read

and contemplated Rowe's evidential argument from evil. The consequential complexity of history makes it impossible to know whether the ultimate net value of the fawn's known suffering will be positive or negative. That being the case, this first objection collapses once again in the face of agnosticism.

The second objection postulates that the consequences of some events may be eventually cancelled out by the consequences of other events. There are two problems with this objection. First, the consequential complexity of history makes it impossible for us to know, for any given event, whether its consequences will one day in the future be cancelled out by the consequences of some other event. Even if we did know, say, by divine revelation, that piece of knowledge would have its own exponentially increasing consequences which would then have to be cancelled out. So, once again, the consequential complexity of history leaves us in a state of agnosticism regarding whether the consequences of any event are eventually cancelled out by the consequences of some other event. The second problem with this objection is that consequences often do not simply unfold in a single, linear chain. Rather, they tend to influence an increasing number of events in neighboring causal chains with the result that the consequences increase at an exponential rate. Lady Churchill's sleeping position on the night that Sir Winston was conceived has now affected billions of people. In order to eventually cancel out an exponentially increasing series of consequences, yet in such a way that we do not find out about the cancellation such that another series of consequences would be generated, requires a cancellation event of preposterous complexity and improbability. Although logically possible, the probability of such complex cancellations is so low that we cannot rationally expect them to occur with any frequency. Even if one or two such complex cancellations did occur between now and the end of history, we would still be in a complete state of agnosticism as to which events have consequences that are eventually cancelled out.

CONCLUSION

Type-4 arguments from evil begin with observations of certain instances, amounts, types or patterns of suffering and conclude that the best explanation for these, on objective grounds, is that gratuitous evil exists, hence, God does not. Reflection upon the consequential complexity of history, however, reveals that we really do not have sufficient objective grounds for claiming that the existence of gratuitous evil is a better explanation than the counter claim. Thus, the consequential complexity of history leaves us with insufficient objective grounds for the conclusion that the 'gratuitous' explanation is better than the 'not-gratuitous' explanation. Type-4 arguments, therefore, fail in the face the agnosticism required by the consequential complexity of history.

1 Bruce Russell, "Defenseless," in D. Howard-Snyder (ed.) *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 194.

2 Kirk Durston, "The consequential complexity of history and gratuitous evil," *Religious Studies*, **36** (2000): 65-80. Also, Kirk Durston, "The complexity of history and evil: a reply to Trakakis," *Religious Studies*, **42**, (2005): 1-13.

3 Russell, "Defenseless," 195.

4 Russell, "Defenseless," 193.

5 Russell, "Defenseless," 195.

6 Russell, "Defenseless," 199-202.

7 See endnote (7) in "Defenseless," 204.

8 Alvin Plantinga, 'Epistemic probability and evil,' in D. Howard-Snyder (ed.) *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, op. cit., 84.

9 Russell, "Defenseless," 203.

10 Peter van Inwagen, "The problems of evil, air, & silence," in D. Howard-Snyder (ed.) *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 154.

11 For example, Christian theists could propose that God has revealed himself in history through the Bible or Jesus Christ. Of course, such propositions would require their own supporting arguments or evidence since they are not likely to be generally granted.

12 Alvin Plantinga, "God, evil, and the metaphysics of freedom," in M. Adams and R. Adams (eds.) *The Problem of Evil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 86. Plantinga's paper was originally part of his book *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 164-193.

13 Plantinga, "God, evil, and the metaphysics of freedom," 106.

14 I am using the word 'history' in the sense of 'a connected or related series of facts, events, etc., especially those concerning a specific group or subject.' (Walter Avis (ed.) *Funk & Wagnalls Standard College Dictionary: Canadian Edition* (Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1978), 636). Used this way, 'history' refers to all connected events, both past and future. I will place the endpoint of history at the end of the physical universe.

15 Included in this notion of substitution is the deletion of a particular event.

16 Durston, "The consequential complexity of history," 70-71, 77-79.

17 William Rowe, "The evidential argument from evil: a second look," in D. Howard-Snyder (ed.) *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 262-285.