Religious Studies **42**, 87–99 © 2006 Cambridge University Press
doi:10.1017/S0034412505008139 Printed in the United Kingdom

The complexity of history and evil: a reply to Trakakis

KIRK DURSTON

New Scholars Society, 7718 R.R. #2, Wallenstein, ON, Canada, N0B 2S0

Abstract: I have presented an argument from the consequential complexity of history against certain types of evidential arguments from evil; 'The consequential complexity of history and gratuitous evil' *Religious Studies*, **36** (2000), 65–80. Nick Trakakis has responded with two objections; 'Evil and the complexity of history: a response to Durston' *Religious Studies*, **39** (2003), 451–458. He argues that the consideration of future consequences to the end of actual history may be irrelevant and, also, that one does not need detailed knowledge about possible worlds to conclude that there are better worlds. In this paper I show that, given the complexity of history, both of his objections fail to move us out of the state of agnosticism regarding what God should or should not permit. Thus, my original argument remains intact.

The consequential complexity of history poses a significant challenge to certain types of evidential arguments from evil that begin with observations of evil that appear to be gratuitous.[1] Nick Trakakis has advanced two objections to this argument, concluding that evidential arguments emerge unscathed by my argument from the complexity of history.[2] I shall begin with a brief summary of my argument, followed by an outline of Trakakis's two objections. Following each objection, I will present my reply.

The argument from the complexity of history

Nick Trakakis has provided a thorough outline of my argument. I will present a concise summary here, but sufficiently detailed to understand the central thrust.

History, which in the context of this argument is to be understood as the set of all connected events both past, present, and future, is composed of innumerable events forming countless, interacting causal chains. A single event in the past

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412505008139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

may at the time appear to be morally insignificant but lead to events of great moral significance decades, centuries, or even millennia later. Similarly, events occurring in the present appear to generate an exponentially increasing number of consequences stretching toward the end of history which, for this argument, is placed at the end of the physical universe. Within this complex web of interacting causal chains and exponentially increasing consequences there are, it is supposed, free agents who can make decisions that are not determined by any antecedent conditions and who, for any decision, could have decided otherwise. Within this world of consequences that expand through the causal chains of history and which are taken into consideration in the deliberations of free agents, are instances of evil that appear to be gratuitous.

A *gratuitous evil* is commonly understood as an evil which God could have prevented without forfeiting some greater good or permitting some evil as bad or worse than the event being examined.[3] If one can justify the inductive or abductive inference to the conclusion that some of these instances of evil are actually gratuitous and do not merely *appear* to be gratuitous, then one is justified in concluding that God does not exist. These two types of inferences form the basis of what Bruce Russell classifies as type-1 and type-2 evidential arguments from evil.[4]

The challenge in such evidential arguments is to justify the inference from observations of evils that *appear* to be gratuitous to the conclusion that some of those evils are actually gratuitous. In order to justify that inference, one must argue that the evil could have been prevented without forfeiting some greater good or permitting some evil as bad or worse. The definition of gratuitous evil presented above entails that one must not only be concerned about the instance of evil itself, but also about any possible greater goods or evils that may be a consequence of allowing the event or disallowing the event. In order to show that no greater good is forfeited and no evil as bad or worse is permitted if the instance of evil is prevented, one must acquire sufficient knowledge of two sets of information.

First, one must have sufficient knowledge of the net moral value of the event with all its consequences to the end of history (call this net moral value A). Second, one must have sufficient knowledge of the net moral value of preventing or substituting the event, along with all the consequences of preventing or substituting the event, to the end of the revised history (call this net moral value B). Only then is one in a position to compare the actual world with the proposed better world, survey the entire set of all consequential goods and evils that might follow from each option, and evaluate the net values of each option.

It is at this point that the consequential complexity of history poses a problem. In order to compare the actual history with an alternate history, we must have knowledge of an unknown number of consequences stretching to the end of history so that we can sum the intrinsic moral value of each consequence to

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412505008139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

calculate A. Secondly, we must look at the proposed, better alternative event and perform the same summing of all the intrinsic moral values of the different set of consequences stretching to the end of the alternate history to calculate B. It is only then that we are in a position to compare the two net moral values and justify our conclusion that God should have, or should not have, permitted the instance of evil being examined. If A–B is negative, then there was a better alternative and the instance of evil was gratuitous.

Unfortunately, the knowledge that we do have regarding the consequences stretching to the end of actual history is miniscule in comparison to what we do not know. For a proposed better world, our knowledge is even less, for although we can propose a different event to substitute for the instance of evil under examination, we can only estimate and guess what the short range consequences will be and we will be utterly ignorant of the myriad long-term consequences to the end of that alternate history.

Ultimately, when we observe an instance of evil that appears to be gratuitous and consider whether A–B is positive or negative, we can come to one of three possible conclusions:

(1) A–B is positive;
(2) A–B is negative;
(3) agnosticism regarding the value of A–B.

It should be apparent in the face of the consequential complexity of histories, both actual and possible, that what we know is so miniscule in comparison with the vast amount of information that we do not know, that the most rationally defensible position to take is (3). Since it follows that we must remain agnostic about whether an instance of evil is gratuitous, the inferences made in type-1 and type-2 arguments from evil cannot be justified rationally and such arguments, therefore, fail.

First objection

The first objection that Trakakis raises is that there are at least two reasons for 'taking remote consequences to be irrelevant to the question of whether a particular evil serves a greater good'.[5] He begins his explanation of the first reason by pointing out that if my argument is granted, then by the same reasoning, 'one may argue that we are never in a position to determine whether God is justified in allowing a good event G to take place'. The underlying problem in my argument, suggests Trakakis, is that 'it takes for granted unreasonably high standards for making acceptable moral or evaluative judgements'. For example, we could not justifiably assert that God is justified in permitting a particular individual to donate money to a children's hospital, but surely we can make acceptable moral or evaluative judgments in spite of the fact

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412505008139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that our knowledge of all the future consequences and other possible worlds is miniscule. Caring for one's sickly grandmother can be deemed to be good in spite of our ignorance of all the consequences to the end of history and, 'thus, God is justified in permitting it'.[6] Similarly, he argues, we can make acceptable moral or evaluative judgments about evil events as well. This first argument can be formalized as follows:

(1) One is justified in believing that caring for one's grandmother is good, in spite of one's ignorance of future consequences to the end of history.
(2) If one is justified in believing that caring for one's grandmother is good in spite of one's ignorance of future consequences to the end of history, then God is justified in permitting it.

thus,

(3) God is justified in permitting it.

The second reason Trakakis advances for taking remote consequences irrelevant to the question of whether a particular evil serves a greater good is that it is sometimes suggested that God could not be justified in permitting an instance of suffering for the sake of some good unless the sufferer partakes of that good. If this is the case then,

> [T]here is simply no need to examine the causal chain extending from the death of the suffering individual to the end of history when considering what purpose, if any, was served by the evil endured by that individual. One need only focus on the goods that could be realized in the course of the sufferer's life.[7]

This second argument can be formalized as follows:

(1a) God is not justified in permitting an instance of suffering for the sake of some good unless the sufferer partakes of that good.
(2a) If (1a), then non-sufferer-experienced future consequences to the end of history are irrelevant in knowing what God is justified in permitting.

Therefore,

(3a) Non-sufferer-experienced future consequences to the end of history are irrelevant in knowing what God is justified in permitting.

At this point Trakakis suggests a third reason by way of an endnote, suggesting that the idea that God permits some evil E for the sake of a good linked to E by a long, causal chain, assumes that causal laws are strictly deterministic. If this view of causation is mistaken, he proposes, then we have a third reason to believe that we need not consider the consequences of E until the end of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412505008139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

history in order to decide the net moral value A.[8] These sorts of considerations seem to undercut my argument for agnosticism, in the face of the consequential complexity of history, with regard to what God should and should not permit.

Reply to first objection

Although my argument from the complexity of history was concerned only with instances of evil, Trakakis is entirely correct in pointing out that the complexity of history also leaves us in a state of agnosticism with regard to whether God is justified in permitting an event that has a *positive* intrinsic moral value. As Michael Almeida and Graham Oppy have so aptly put it, 'no doubt there were all kinds of good deeds which were causally necessary for Hitler to be born'.[9] Trakakis's point follows from my argument, but provides no help in attempts to salvage evidential arguments from evil in the face of the consequential complexity of history.

Trakakis's worry, however, is that if we are left in a state of agnosticism with respect to what *good* events God should permit, then we are left with 'unreasonably high standards for making acceptable moral or evaluative judgements'. The assumption that Trakakis is making is that the individual must know whether A–B is positive or negative before that individual can be justified in making an acceptable moral judgement. Since we do not know whether A–B is positive for any event, then we do not know whether, ultimately, any decision we make will eventually lead to a greater good (A–B turns out to be positive) or a greater evil (A–B turns out to be negative). He summarizes his worry as follows:

> T If a person is unable to make any all-things-considered judgements (about the moral value of some event), then that person is morally permitted to act in any way he/she chooses.[10]

By 'any all-things-considered judgements', he is referring to the outcome of A–B and whether it is positive or negative.

Trakakis relies heavily for T on an argument advanced by Almeida and Oppy, so I shall respond by dealing with their argument directly. They suggest that the moral reasoning we perform when arriving at a moral decision can be represented as follows:

> (1) There is a *pro tanto* reason for me to intervene to prevent E. (Indeed, I have a *pro tanto* duty to intervene to prevent E.) (Premise)
> (2) I have found no *pro tanto* reason for me not to intervene to prevent E. (Premise)
> (3) (Hence) There is no *pro tanto* reason for me not to intervene to prevent E. (From 2)

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412505008139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(4) (Hence) I have all things considered reason to intervene to prevent E. (From 1,3)[11]

Almeida, Oppy, and Trakakis, argue that if one cannot make the 'noseeum' inference from (2) to (3), then one cannot make a rational, moral decision.

By way of response, it must be pointed out that the consequential complexity of history does pose a problem with the 'noseeum' inference from (2) to (3) and this problem is raised by none other than Almeida and Oppy themselves. They state,

> [O]f course, none of us can know all of the long term consequences of any action we perform – no doubt there were all kinds of good deeds which were causally necessary for Hitler to be born – and to this extent we are always 'out of our depth' (in the sense that we are unable to *fully* evaluate the considerations which bear on our decisions) in deciding what to do.[12]

It would appear, from what they have conceded from the complexity of history, that the inference from (2) to (3) is problematic. Although they do not return to deal with this problem raised by the complexity of history, specifically, the remainder of the paper seems to indicate that their solution to this problem is to assign probabilities to various possibilities including, it would seem, the possibility that A–B is positive. They state, 'In practical considerations, no less than in theoretical considerations – probabilities are the stuff of deliberation. And, whereof one is not prepared to assign probabilities, thereof one is simply not able to deliberate.'[13]

With the problem of the consequential complexity of history in mind, and Almeida's and Oppy's commitment to assign probabilities in moral deliberation, it would appear that their (3) should be modified to include the word 'likely'.

(3a) (Hence) There is likely no *pro tanto* reason for me not to intervene to prevent E.

With this in mind, when faced with a choice of preventing E or permitting E and the need, according to Almeida and Oppy, to assign an epistemic probability to the possibility that A–B is negative, we have three choices:

(a) the epistemic probability that A–B is negative is greater than 0.5;
(b) the epistemic probability that A–B is negative is less than 0.5;
(c) the epistemic probability that A–B is negative is about 0.5.

I have already argued that, given the consequential complexity of history, the most rational position to hold is agnosticism regarding whether A–B is positive or negative for any event. Since agnosticism is equivalent to an epistemic probability of 0.5 in either/or considerations, it follows that (c) is the most rational position to hold. Almeida and Oppy have presented no argument for choosing anything other than (c). Indeed, they have stated that we are always

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412505008139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

'out of our depth' when it comes to the consequential complexity of history. Thus, their inference from (2) to (3), or even (3a) fails when it comes to the consequential complexity of history. As they have already conceded, if one cannot make the 'noseeum' inference from (2) to (3), then one cannot make a rational, moral decision, at least if one grants the moral reasoning they suggest in proceeding from (1) through (4). It would seem, then, that in the absence of an argument for choosing either (a) or (b) over (c), both the Durstonian theist as well as Trakakis, Almeida, and Oppy all find themselves in the same boat, unable to arrive at rational moral decisions.

The first step in a solution to this problem is to conclude that the moral reasoning suggested by Almeida and Oppy, in going from (1) to (4), is inaccurate in describing how the average person, including a sceptical theist of the Durstonian sort, arrives at a rational, moral decision. An alternate solution is to embrace the generally held intuition regarding justified moral action, which can be stated as follows:

> J An agent is morally obliged to act on the basis of what that agent could reasonably be expected to know.

The proposition J seems to be a more apt description of how we arrive at a decision for moral action. For example, a steeplejack throwing bricks off a roof would be held morally responsible if a person below was injured even if she did not know he was there, because knowledge of whether or not there was someone below was within reasonable grasp. No judge would dismiss the charges simply because the steeplejack argued that neither she nor the court was in a position to know if A–B was positive or negative for the careless tossing of a brick off a roof. Such an excuse would be thought absurd, for it would be readily apparent that, even though no human can be expected to have such knowledge, every human is still expected to make justifiable moral decisions on the basis of J.

Almeida and Oppy, however, can argue that J fails to provide an adequate method to make rational moral decisions unless one can assign probabilities to the various possibilities, including the possibility that A–B is negative or positive. Fortunately, the consequential complexity of history does enable us to assign an epistemic probability of 0.5 to the possibility that A–B is negative (or positive) for the chain of events to the end of history, initiated by E. An epistemic probability 0.5 for either/or considerations (A–B is either positive or negative) means that we cannot assign any weight to the outcome of A–B. Thus, under J, we will have to make our rational moral decisions on what we could reasonably be expected to know, with each piece of knowledge weighted according to probability considerations.

Trakakis has suggested that my argument from the complexity of history leaves a Durstonian sceptic with unreasonably high standards for making acceptable

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412505008139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

moral and evaluative judgements. We can now see why Trakakis's first argument fails. The problem is with his second premise,

> (2) If one is justified in believing that caring for one's grandmother is good in spite of one's ignorance of future consequences to the end of history, then God is justified in permitting it.

It does not follow that because we are justified in believing something is good that therefore God is justified in permitting it. Under J, we can be fully justified in believing that caring for our grandmother is good while at the same time we can acknowledge that, given what an omniscient being could reasonably be expected to know, God might not be justified in permitting it. Thus, under J, remote consequences *are* relevant to an omniscient being in determining what should be permitted, but are not relevant to humans who cannot reasonably be expected to have knowledge of such consequences.

Trakakis's second argument stands or falls upon the following, somewhat worrisome premise,

> (1a) God is not justified in permitting an instance of suffering for the sake of some greater good unless the sufferer partakes of that good.

Trakakis does acknowledge my suggestion that an individual who must suffer for the sake of greater goods of which she does not partake, may be compensated in the afterlife. But, barring divine revelation that such things do occur, we must remain agnostic about that form of compensation. If Trakakis is willing to admit this as a possible fulfillment of his (1a), then this second argument is effectively addressed and we are still in a state of agnosticism regarding what God should or should not permit.

If Trakakis is not willing to permit this as a consequential benefit to the sufferer, then a difficult problem arises. Since God must prevent all evils that lead to greater goods, or prevent greater evils, except for the subset that satisfies (1a), much more divine intervention would be required in this world, along with all the accompanying consequences of that radically increased intervention. Every case in history where, as the result of the sacrifice or suffering of certain people, tens, thousands, or millions more people benefited or were spared from certain evils would all have to be prevented by God, since the people making the sacrifice or who suffered did not partake in some way of the goods or avoidance of greater evils. In each case, God would not only be obliged to prevent the sacrifice or suffering, but He would also be obliged continually to intervene in history to make up for the loss of the greater goods or occurrence of the greater evils that would otherwise have been prevented. Indeed, if, as it seems to be, consequences of events increase exponentially

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412505008139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

through the interacting causal chains, then the number of greater goods that will be forfeit and greater evils not avoided may increase exponentially as history progresses under (1a), requiring God to increase His interference in this world at an exponential rate to ensure that no-one experienced any consequential deprivation of goods or occurrence of evils that they did not benefit from.

A possible problem with such a radically different world is highlighted by Peter van Inwagen, who has argued to the effect that God allows some number of evils in this world, not because they have some greater instrumental value, but because He must limit how much He interferes in this world. The more He interferes, the more the regularity of the world is threatened. At some point God must restrain Himself from intervening further.[14] Trakakis's suggestion would require a great deal more interference by God. Indeed, it could be the case that we would not even be permitted to think negative thoughts if doing so had a non-beneficial, detrimental physiological effect on the person experiencing that sort of evil.

With regard to whether the regularity of the world would be destroyed with such a high degree of interference, we can choose to defend one of three possible conclusions:

(a) the regularity of the world would be destroyed;
(b) the regularity of the world would not be destroyed;
(c) agnosticism about whether or not the regularity of the world would be destroyed.

Given our virtually non-existent knowledge about what such a bizarre world would be like on a day-to-day basis, and what the outcome of such a world would be, and what degree of unbalance it would have, option (c) seems easiest to defend and option (b) most difficult. Since agnosticism regarding (1a) is of no help in overcoming the agnosticism I have argued for as a result of the complexity of history, my argument still stands. To sustain his objection, Trakakis must move us out of agnosticism by providing an argument for (1a) taking into consideration Van Inwagen's argument.

Trakakis's third argument for his first objection suggests that the idea that God permits some evil E for the sake of a good linked to E by a long, causal chain, assumes that causal laws are strictly deterministic. If this view of causation is mistaken, he suggests, then we have a third reason to believe that we need not consider the consequences of E until the end of history in order to decide the net moral value A.

By way of response, since my argument assumes the existence of free agents, whose decisions are not determined by any antecedent conditions, there is no assumption that the state of the world at any time in the future is strictly determined. If some event E only weakly actualizes[15] the future, it may not be

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412505008139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

sufficient to determine the consequences to the end of history, but it is still necessary. To clarify, his third argument assumes that an event E must be both necessary and sufficient to produce the future consequences to the end of history. My argument only requires that E be necessary; it does not require it to be sufficient. As long as it is necessary, then the future consequences to the end of history are contingent upon E, but not determined solely by E, and my argument remains intact. Thus, his third argument, suggested by way of an endnote, fails to move us out of agnosticism regarding what God should or should not permit.

Second objection

Trakakis's second objection centres around my argument for agnosticism regarding the net moral value B of some other possible world we may propose in lieu of the world in which an evil event E2 occurs. The bulk of his objection is spent in a series of thrusts and parries, alternately examining possible arguments that we can, in fact, propose better alternatives to the world in which E2 occurs, but then acknowledging that key points in my argument figure against those arguments. It is not until the final paragraph that he puts forward an unanswered objection. He states,

> Undoubtedly, the consequences of deleting or substituting E2 from our world would be far-reaching, though it is difficult to say how far they would reach. Nevertheless, one would suppose that in deleting E2 it is likely that the consequences would be better than those that result from the actual occurrence of E2. But even if we assume that in some worlds the consequences are no better or even worse, surely there are also some worlds in which the consequences *are* better. Our lack of precise knowledge as to what our world and nearby possible worlds are like to the end of history is no impediment to seeing that at least some nearby worlds would have a brighter future than ours in virtue of not containing E2.[16]

His objection can be formalized as follows:

(1) Surely, there are worlds where the consequences of deleting E2 are better.

(2) If we know there are worlds where the consequences of deleting E2 are better, then we have no need of precise knowledge regarding future consequences in order to justify the conclusion that God should have prevented E2.

therefore,

(3) Surely, we have no need of precise knowledge regarding future consequences in order to justify the conclusion that God should have prevented E_2.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412505008139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Reply to second objection

Trakakis's second objection is based on the assumption that 'surely there are also some worlds in which the consequences (of preventing E2) *are* better'. When we consider the definition of gratuitous evil presented earlier, it is clear that this assumption is logically equivalent to 'surely E2 is gratuitous'. But the objective of discussions of type-1 and type-2 evidential arguments for evil, and the possible role of the complexity of history, is to determine whether or not such evils are gratuitous. Trakakis is assuming the conclusion in his opening premise and his argument is, therefore, circular.

He may be appealing to our intuition that we can, indeed, think of better worlds, but he will need to defend that intuition in the face of the cold, hard reality of the consequential complexity of history. This will be difficult in light of his admission that, '[u]ndoubtedly, the consequences of deleting or substituting E2 from our world would be far-reaching', and 'it is difficult to say how far they would reach'. From his comments, I believe that Trakakis realizes that even though two worlds may have an identical past, and be quite close initially after E2 is prevented in one of those worlds, the future of the two worlds would diverge and that divergence would not only be 'far-reaching' but continue until the end of the two possible histories.

With this in mind, one wonders if there even is such a thing as 'close' possible worlds that contain free agents, except for those worlds that begin to diverge only near the end of their histories. It may be more accurate, given what we observe about the consequential complexity of history, to speak of possible worlds that have not diverged very far apart at some point in their histories, rather than of, simply, close possible worlds.

To avoid circularity, Trakakis must provide an argument for (1), but it is difficult to see how he will do that without considering the consequences, to the end of various possible histories, of deleting or permitting E2, given his admission that the consequences will be far reaching. His second objection, therefore, fails in light of its circularity and, given the lack of an argument for his initial premise, fails to move us out of the agnosticism that the consequential complexity of history seems to force us into.

A final worry

In personal correspondence, Nick Trakakis has raised an additional worry. I have already acknowledged that Trakakis is entirely correct in pointing out that the complexity of history also leaves us in a state of agnosticism with regard to whether God is justified in permitting an event that has a *positive* intrinsic moral value. This follows from my argument and does nothing to salvage evidential arguments from evil from the implications of the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412505008139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

consequential complexity of history. It does raise a worry, however, which he lays out as follows:

> Theists often say that God is to be thanked and praised for allowing (certain good states of affairs) to come to pass. But the theist's gratitude towards God presupposes that:
>
> (a) God is morally justified in permitting the events in question; and
> (b) we are epistemically justified in accepting (a).
>
> On the other hand, sceptical theists of the Durstonian variety, in virtue of rejecting (b), have no grounds for thanking or praising God.[17]

In response, it can be granted that a theist who thanks and praises God is implicitly assuming that (a) is the case. Also, a sceptical theist of the Durstonian variety may reject (b). It does not follow, however, that she has no grounds for thanking and praising God.

Trakakis's worry is only valid within the neutral arena of technical discussions of the problem of evil. He has failed to distinguish between what goes on within that neutral arena, and what goes on outside that arena. It is common procedure, in technical discussions of the problem of evil, to assume that the probability of the existence of God, on our background knowledge is 0.5.[18] For the theist, this means that appeals to faith, divine revelation, personal experiences of God, a priori assurances and convictions, and other such grounds that the atheist may not grant, are all temporarily set aside.

For such a theist, the probability of the existence of God, on his background knowledge, may actually be much greater than 0.5. For the sake of technical discussions within a neutral area, however, the theist grants a probability of 0.5, as does the atheist who, outside of such technical discussions, may actually feel that the probability of God's existence is considerably lower than 0.5. When the discussion is over and the Durstonian theist steps outside the neutral arena, she can pick up the faith, assurances, convictions, and personal experiences of God, which she set aside upon entering the arena, and continue on her way thanking and praising God on the basis of those things she left outside the neutral arena. Trakakis's worry, therefore, that the Durstonian theist will not have grounds to thank and praise God, is groundless.

Conclusion

Trakakis's first objection, composed of three arguments, fails to undercut my argument against type-1 and type-2 evidential arguments from history. His first argument assumes that God must justify His decisions on the basis of what less knowledgeable creatures could reasonably be expected to know, not upon what He, as an omniscient being, knows. His second two arguments fail to move us out of the agnosticism which the complexity of history justifies.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412505008139 Published online by Cambridge University Press

His second major objection assumes the conclusion in his initial premise, leading his argument into circularity. Since neither of his objections succeed, my argument from the consequential complexity of history against type-1 and type-2 evidential arguments remains intact.

His final worry is valid only within the neutral arena of technical discussions of the problem of evil. Once the Durstonian theist steps outside that arena, he is free to pick up his faith and personal experience of God and continue on his way, thanking and praising God in spite of his acknowledged limitations due to the consequential complexity of history. Evidential arguments from evil, however, within the neutral arena of technical discussion, are left to face the devastating consequences of the consequential complexity of history. If such arguments are to survive rationally, they will have to deal with the cold, hard reality of the consequential complexity of history.

Notes

1. Kirk Durston 'The consequential complexity of history and gratuitous evil', *Religious Studies*, **36** (2000), 65–80.
2. Nick Trakakis 'Evil and the complexity of history: a response to Durston', *Religious Studies*, **39** (2003), 451–458.
3. I use here a commonly understood definition of gratuitous, or pointless, evil; see William Alston 'The inductive argument from evil', in Daniel Howard-Snyder (ed.) *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Bloomington and Indianapolis IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 98, 100.
4. Bruce Russell 'Defenseless', in Howard-Snyder *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, 193–194.
5. Trakakis 'Response to Durston', 454.
6. *Ibid*., 454.
7. *Ibid*., 455.
8. *Ibid*., n. 11, 458.
9. M. J. Almeida and G. Oppy 'Sceptical theism and evidential arguments from evil', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, **81** (2003), 512.
10. Nick Trakakis, personal correspondence.
11. Almeida and Oppy, 'Sceptical theism and evidential arguments from evil', 507.
12. *Ibid*., 512.
13. *Ibid*., 515.
14. Peter van Inwagen 'The problems of evil, air and silence', in Howard-Snyder *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, 158. See also *idem* 'Reflections on the chapters by Draper, Russell and Gale', *ibid*., 234.
15. For a discussion of weak actualization, see James E. Tomberlin and Peter van Inwagen (eds) *Alvin Plantinga* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1985), 48, 49. In brief, an event or agent weakly actualizes the state S of the world at time *t* if it provides the necessary conditions within which free agents can actualize S at time *t*. Thus, the event is necessary for S, but not sufficient. Also required are the appropriate decisions of the free agents.
16. Trakakis 'Response to Durston', 457.
17. Trakakis personal correspondence.
18. See, for example, Durston 'The consequential complexity of history and gratuitous evil', 76; Russell 'Defenseless', 199; William L. Rowe 'The evidential argument from evil: a second look', in Howard-Snyder *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, 265; Ian Wilks 'The structure of the contemporary debate on the problem of evil', *Religious Studies*, **40** (2004), 308–309.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412505008139 Published online by Cambridge University Press