



# The Theological Philosophy of William Temple: A Desire Argument and a Compassionate Theodicy

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## Abstract

In this paper, I will investigate the early work of William Temple (1881–1944). My contention is that Temple’s systematic philosophy contains resources for an interesting variant of a desire argument for God’s existence and for the truth of Christianity. This desire argument moves from claims about the nature of human reason to the conditions for its satisfaction and how that satisfaction might be achieved. In constructing this argument, Temple confronts the problem of evil, and so I will also outline his response to the problem here. Temple is often overlooked in histories of philosophy, though he was conversant with philosophical classics, including Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, and Lotze, and, to list a few of the contemporaries or near-contemporaries: Balfour, Haldane, F. H. Bradley, A. C. Bradley, Moore, Bosanquet, Joachim, and Croce. He also acknowledges, in the preface to his main philosophical work *Mens Creatrix*, a special debt to Bergson, but also signals distance from him in the same place. Temple presents an interesting case of a philosopher and theologian (most of his books are a mixture of the two, some being more predominantly one or the other) because of his commitment to philosophical system in the midst of early analytic philosophy.

**Keywords** William Temple · Theodicy · Desire Argument · Christianity · Problem of Evil

William Temple (1881–1944) was a philosopher, theologian, and archbishop of the Anglican church. In this paper, I want to provide an outline of a major thread running

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throughout his philosophical thought. Though often overlooked by philosophers, Temple taught philosophy at Oxford in the 1910s, and this is the period where much of his writing comes from, though his corpus extends right up to his death.<sup>1</sup> He was conversant with philosophical classics, including Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, and Lotze, and, to list a few of the contemporaries or near-contemporaries: Balfour, Haldane, F. H. Bradley, A. C. Bradley, Moore, Bosanquet, Joachim, and Croce. He also acknowledges, in the preface to his main philosophical work *Mens Creatrix*, a special debt to Bergson, but also signals distance from him in the same place. Temple presents an interesting case of a philosopher and theologian (most of his books are a mixture of the two, some being more predominantly one or the other) because of his commitment to philosophical system in the midst of early analytic philosophy.<sup>2</sup> It has been noted by Padgett (1974, 2) that Temple had a unity to his thought such that works published in early or later life do not radically differ. However, as Padgett takes the late *Nature, Man, and God* to be his primary text, I take the early *Mens Creatrix* as mine. Whilst others have noted that Temple's account of the problem of evil is a kind of 'Greater Good' strategy, it is less well appreciated that Temple gives a 'pastoral' twist to this account – that the problem of evil is *not* a problem to be solved by the philosopher, but a problem of life itself.

Even though it cannot be said that Temple's influence extended very far, it is an important footnote to the history of philosophy in Great Britain that, reasonably recently, the highest seat in the Anglican communion was held by someone who for a time wanted to be a professional philosopher and wrote philosophical works.<sup>3</sup> In this paper, I intend to focus in on what I see as a variant of the desire argument for God's existence which runs throughout his early philosophical work (in the first and second sections), before turning to the related question of the problem of evil (the third section).

## 1 The Fourfold Convergence of Philosophy

*MC* contains an interesting philosophical argument designed to lead us to accept the need for some kind of sustained theological engagement. Temple tells us at the outset of *MC* that the presupposition of all philosophy is that reality is a unity or whole (1f). He also tells us later on that this is something that no one can deny – by which

<sup>1</sup> His mainly philosophical works are *The Nature of Personality* (1911) (hereafter *NP*) and *Mens Creatrix* (1917) (*MC*), as well as the late *Nature, Man, and God* (1949) which was based on Gifford Lectures. He also gave a paper at the Joint Session, published in *Mind* as Temple (1922). Theological works include: *Studies in the Spirit and Truth of Christianity* (1914) (*STC*) – a collection of sermons; *The Faith and Modern Thought* (1912) and *The Kingdom of God* (1912) (*KG*), *The Universality of Christ* (1921) (*UC*) *Christus Veritas* (1922), the theological complement to *Mens Creatrix*.

<sup>2</sup> I agree with Padgett (1974, 10) and Miller (1939, *passim*) that Temple remains deeply idealistic, even as idealism fell out of favour in philosophy more broadly. Padgett also notes that Temple is also influenced by the *Lux Mundi* group of liberal Anglo-Catholics (11).

<sup>3</sup> There is not much secondary literature on Temple's philosophical work. Examples include Miller (1939), Owen (1961) Fletcher (1963) and Padgett (1974).

he seems to mean not that one is caught in a logical contradiction if one claims it, but that if one does any kind of rational inquiry whilst not believing it, one is caught in a kind of performative contradiction. That is, it is logically possible to do philosophy and not believe that the universe is a rational unity or whole, but the nature of philosophy is such that it proceeds as if it is true, because it seeks explanation that turns out to be ultimate. I think this is more than just the claim that no truth contradicts any other truth, or that all truths cohere. I take this to be what one might call a methodological priority monism. That is, Temple thinks that philosophical enquiry presupposes that there exists a whole, which has proper parts, though those parts are derivative. I think this is a *methodological* point because it concerns philosophical reasoning about the world, which can only terminate (for Temple) in God. But Temple would not, I think, want to identify God and the world, or claim that “God and World” are the one basic existent. I read Temple’s claim as basically similar to Sellars’ famous claim that philosophy is the attempt to see how things in the broadest sense of the term hang together in the broadest sense of the term. Temple would emphasise that trying to see ‘how’ things hang together presupposes that they do indeed hang together.<sup>4</sup>

Temple then moves through the natures of key philosophical fields – Epistemology, Aesthetics, Moral Philosophy, and Philosophy of Religion, before arguing that the only way to properly systematise these is the metaphysics provided by Christianity, particularly the doctrine of the incarnation. I shall now turn to a more detailed exposition of the argument as a whole. In order to do that, I will summarise Temple’s thought at each stage, paying particular attention to why it is that he thinks that each mode of enquiry must terminate at some stage that it cannot move beyond, though it points or signals something beyond itself.

Temple tells us that each of the fields he surveys contains something odd. This oddness is the fact that each sub-discipline of philosophy yields views that seem true, but also seem to be incomplete or pointing toward something else. Each field is also in some way determined by the general philosophical presupposition that wholeness or unity is a guiding or regulative idea, to use Kantian terminology, in philosophy. With Knowledge, or epistemology, this is that there is a community of knowers; no one thinker able to access the entire scope of the real or the true. In this sense we might, he says, metaphorically think of the ‘Absolute subject’ as the whole human race (MC 85). But only truth as a whole can give intellectual satisfaction (MC 50). However, truth is only ever accessible in part to individuals, rather than as a system. So we are at a point where the society of knowers, the human race, can demand no more of the intellect – ‘The intellect *working only upon the principles of its own procedure* will never lead to the Transcendent God of Religion’ (MC 86). This is because the God of Religion, which Temple thinks is the only thing that could finally satisfy the intellect, is beyond its power to comprehend. This is partly, as we shall see in the latter section of this paper, because the God of Religion requires a practical orientation that the intellect (again, in isolation) does not have. Temple is not saying that belief in a religious conception of God is anti-intellectual

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<sup>4</sup> Sellars (1963, 1).

(far from it), only that the intellectual side of the approach to the divine is incomplete without the other sides. Truth as a whole also has to ‘hold within itself all the values realised in all the ages’ otherwise it would be mere historical flux and change, rather than an organic whole. In answer to the question of why we need to bring in any absolute being (or anything like God or the transcendent) at all, Temple says:

We are bound to do so because the impulse of Self-Transcendence, of which the Will to Know is one manifestation, is always an impulse to the Whole; it reveals itself alike in the sacrifice of love or loyalty and in the search of science; it is the determination to get beyond one’s mere particularity (though we can never leave it behind) and apprehend the Whole and our place in it and dependence on it (*MC* 85).

In other words, Temple’s view is that when we understand the will to know, we know that it cannot be fully satisfied, or we cannot reach intellectual satisfaction, unless we have at least some supra-temporal conception of reality. However, the question of why there is such a supra-temporal unity at all is not within the ability of the intellect to determine. In the pursuit of this conception the intellect gets to the stage when it asks the most general questions of all – why does anything exist. This is unanswerable from the perspective of the intellect alone, it requires some other department of mind. This is because ‘Totality had been reached, and the legitimate impulse of Intellect had reached its goal. But if from some other department of Mind’s activity an answer is suggested, the intellect (if not impeded by “intellectualist” dogmatism) will gladly accept it’ (*MC* 88f). In other words, according to the procedures of knowledge and explanation alone, we cannot accept any theory of why the universe or the whole exists. But that does not stop us from accepting a proposal from elsewhere, so long as it does not contradict our knowledge.<sup>5</sup> So considering of the knowing ability of the mind has led us to think that there is some sort of unity to reality, and to explain various features of this unity, but be unable to explain the unity itself without hypotheses from other sources. Thus Temple turns to another source – Art.

The main significance of art for Temple is twofold. That firstly, it ‘points to a perfect grasp of the entire Universe in all its extent of space and time by an Eternal Mind, such as we saw would be the appropriate culmination of that fabric of Truth which Intellect constructs’ (*MC* 126). This is because, in aesthetic experience, ‘we receive what absolutely satisfies us, and in that perfect satisfaction we ourselves are lost. Duration vanishes; the “moment eternal” is come’ (*MC* 125f). When confronted with works of art, Temple thinks we have a sense, however fleeting, of the whole, and its interconnection. This he calls the ‘mystical character’ of art (*MC* 120). This mystical character is why art points to a perfect grasp of the universe – because however fleetingly, we can have an inchoate sense of that grasp. Temple is not saying that this is good enough evidence to conclude that therefore there is such a being that has a perfect grasp, but that we can have enough to ‘postulate’ one, by which he seems to mean we have enough to assume the existence of a being, and then see if it provides intellectual satisfaction, and then draw a conclusion from that. The results

<sup>5</sup> Compare Kant on the moral argument, as presented in Kant (1996).

of the philosophical enquiry into the nature of knowledge and the intellect left room for such an idea, and art seems to suggest that such a being is at least possible. The second way in which art is significant for Temple is that it shows the possibility of grasping the whole by grasping a particular. He says: ‘the perfect expression of any element in being can for a moment stand for the whole Universe; and that the perfect expression of a theme co-extensive with life can stand permanently for the whole Universe’ (MC 126). This is said to be the reason why an object in time can cause us to lose ourselves and have timeless experiences – because by apprehending the work of art we get a sense of the whole succession of time in a single moment.

In his discussion of the imagination, Temple argues that the imagination and intellect are two sides of the same coin, and therefore that in order for the intellect to be satisfied, there must be some satisfaction of the intellect as well. Temple says:

What we require, if we can find it, is some embodiment or presentation of Universal Truth which may awaken and lead into captivity to itself the whole emotional nature of men. It is not only that it may “enter in at lowly doors”, but that it may be potent in the heart of any man alive, that we desiderate “Truth embodied in a tale” (MC 160-1).

In order for the intellect and reason in general to reach intellectual satisfaction, there needs to be an account of how this truth can be imaginatively embodied.<sup>6</sup> The task of how this might come about informs, I think, the transition from Art to Conduct, which *Mens Creatrix* is less than perspicuous about.

Temple says, at the opening of the section on Conduct, that we ‘have now to consider the psychic life in which all manner of impulses find their place side by side with Mind, and which Mind has to organise into a harmonious whole by its own methods’ (MC 165). So the rationale for the section on Conduct seems to be that there is some process of organisation of the raw materials of our moral or practical life, which also informs our prior intellectual aims regarding the satisfaction of the intellect and imagination. This is supported by what Temple says later – that there is a ‘guiding idea’ or ‘principle of unity in the vast drama which is called human history’, and in finding out more about this principle of unity ‘a man can make his life part of an artistic or perfect whole, with relative completeness and perfection in itself’ (MC 175). The reason that we are entitled to think that perhaps there may be a ‘guiding idea’ in history, is that whilst the facts of the past are not changeable, the significance of those facts is changeable, which Temple notes is at the edge of the Atonement doctrine. Events change significance because we discover new things about them, or they enable us to make changes in our lives that would not otherwise be possible. Hence Temple’s remarkable claim: ‘The later in time has upon the earlier a far greater influence than the earlier upon the later’. (MC 174). If humanity (beings who are thereby shaping the future, and the future is the locus of their

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<sup>6</sup> Temple also has an interesting discussion of tragedy, and he thinks that such an imaginative embodiment must do full justice to the solemn truths communicated by tragedy, but I leave this out for reasons of space.

interest) then represents any kind of advance, or progress, on the rest of nature, then we might well investigate whether this provides us with a key to the problem of ultimate reality – that the future (ends and reasons) rather than the past (causes) could provide us with some satisfying explanation. Temple's discussion of Conduct has much in it, regarding free will, education, and even a remarkable (and one might think, remarkably naïve), chapter on the “virtues” of the British Empire. However, for my purposes, the other aspect I need to look at is Temple's account of ethics and the moral will.

The Golden Rule, Temple says, contains the whole of moral duty, and no other rule does (*MC* 206). The one ‘ultimate and invariably duty’ is to love one's neighbour as oneself, and the ‘how’ of this love might alter from time to time, but the love is still commanded. This moral will is therefore shaped by the command to love, and the person who wills this love can see, even if indistinctly, how the moral duty to love fits in with their life so as to provide a unity. The unity is important because Temple thinks that persons who are fundamentally disjointed are not full persons – without discipline and a united vision, a person is ‘a chaos of impulses’ (*MC* 169). The task to mould this chaos into a person with a loving will is the task of society and of education.<sup>7</sup> The key here is that the vision of the moral imposes a kind of unity on the raw materials of the human. But the question of course is – whence the moral ideal? This requires the final move to religion.

When Temple moves to discuss Religion, the final aspect of the fourfold convergence, he makes this important statement:

Ethics suggests a Will which is perfectly self-determined, and yet is active altogether in love; such a Will, if it be made manifest, will satisfy the aspiration of Art, for its manifestation will claim and deserve eternal contemplation; such a Will, if it control the Universe, is the very principle of unity which Science seeks for Will... (*MC* 258)

The good life is ‘an artistic masterpiece’ which is the half-truth behind Nietzsche's account of the Superman (*MC* 257). Through the work we have seen how the account of the intellectual system comes to require something like God. Therefore ‘Man's creative mind can find satisfaction only if there be a Divine creative mind with which it may have communion’ (*MC* 258). The majority of the section on religion is taken up with Temple's discussion of the problem of evil, which is the subject of section three of this essay. I will therefore consider more generally the significance of Temple's project.

It is clear that Temple has set himself a huge task.<sup>8</sup> In the abstract, his view is that philosophy has a constitutive aim, the fulfilment of which lies in Christian theology. But each part of philosophy (namely, science/epistemology, art, morality, religion) also have constitutive aims. The aim of philosophy as such is to reach a final system of the world. The aims of each individual branch of philosophy are supposed to be subsidiary to this in some way – e.g. the aim of

<sup>7</sup> These are dealt with in *MC* chs. XVI–XVII.

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Brightman (1918, 211) remarked that Temple was trying to provide a new *Summa Theologica*.

science and epistemology is to reach a unified conception of these parts of the world. It appears that there must be some goal, the acceptance of which as one's own goal, forms a kind of entry-condition on the rationality of these practices. So a scientist, in order to be doing science rationally, needs to accept that what they are doing has some meaning for the progress of science as a whole and somehow fits into the absolute conception of the world that science aims at. I will turn to Temple's views in moral philosophy to see how one might challenge this and what Temple might say in return.

Using the terminology of the preceding paragraph, we could say that for Temple, the moral life has as an entry-condition on its rationality that one accept that morality has a governing ideal which guides the agent to an end-state of the moral life. But one might question this. It seems that Temple might be accepting some kind of principle to the effect that if something has no lasting, permanent value for some project of the whole human species (or of rational agents) then there is a problem. But it seems plausible that an agent could just do something that makes them happy, and be under no illusion that what they are doing is somehow contributing to the grand projects of human nature. As stated, this seems like a good point, but is stated at the wrong level of generality. For Temple, it is *not* that each individual instance of a general kind of activity (e.g. pleasure-seeking activity) needs to be thought of as somehow contributing to the grand projects, but that engaging in the type of activity in general *does* need to be thought of this way. So whilst an agent might not need to think that playing computer games is in any sense part of some larger rational project, they do need to think that pleasure-seeking activity is somehow worthwhile, and this means that it fits into some larger whole. The larger whole that it fits in will be the moral life.

This is because Temple, whilst clearly accepting Christian morality, does not accept an austere Kantian-style rendering of this view. Indeed, he makes it quite clear that compromise between moral ideals and the actual state of the world is necessary in order for those ideals to actually make a difference to the way the world is, rather than being too 'otherworldly' and inapplicable. (*MC* 202, *KG* 84, 89, 95) This is one way in which he thinks that pleasure-seeking activity might form part of a larger whole, and thereby rendered rational. Another way is that he rejects a rendering of the command to 'Love thy neighbour as thyself' which might minimise the 'as thyself' part. To see this, consider that there are two ways of reading the 'as thyself' clause. One, the descriptive way, is to see the command as saying: 'You ought to love your neighbour as much as you actually love yourself now'. This is silent on whether we ought to love ourselves as well – it takes it as a given fact that humans or rational agents will love themselves and uses that as a benchmark. The normative way of reading the clause is to see the command as saying: 'You ought to love your neighbour as much as you ought to love yourself'. This of course refers us back to some further standard of how much we are to love humans in general, which is of course the Golden Rule – that we ought to do unto others as we would like to have done unto us. By saying that this rule is the sum of all morality, I think he signals that he accepts a kind of normative reading of the 'as thyself' clause. To read the command as then minimising the necessity of self-love, as long as it is properly ordered within a larger whole, is not Temple's own way.

This means that Temple needs no special account of why pleasure-seeking activity is made rational, or why one needs to be conscious of some constitutive end of pleasure-seeking activity. It is just a necessary part of the moral life, and the moral life has a constitutive end of the highest kind of moral life, which itself forms a part of the intellectual system of philosophy.

## 2 The Importance of Temple's Project

Temple's project is a remarkable attempt at philosophical systematising, and also at bringing philosophy into a deeper engagement with theology, where, according to Temple, it finds its ultimate satisfaction. We can see Temple's project as an extended execution of a kind of 'desire argument' for God's existence, and moreover, for the truth of Christianity. Temple's project is then potentially much more powerful than others, because he does not accept that the truth of Christianity is something that one cannot argue for starting from a neutral philosophical point. This is not to say, however, that he thinks that he can prove it. Like all the arguments surrounding God's existence or the truth of a particular religion, Temple thinks that it requires an exercise of faith. Indeed, at one point he says that the level of evidence for Christ's existence is actually an optimum – enough to support a rational belief, but not enough to compel acceptance. (*MC* 317–20, 341 *KG* 57f). And indeed, there is no argument that one can give for the idea that the universe is a rational place, or that it forms a unity. That is just a basic presupposition. The argument rests on faith in another way – that one who does not want to accept the conclusion could just deny a premise, for example that we are committed to unity or system, or that we could accept ultimate scepticism.

The desire argument that covers the whole book is then of the following form:

- 1) Human Reason has certain needs built into it
- 2) These needs are for the unity or system of the whole
- 3) This unity or system is the end of all the projects (political, moral, cultural, philosophical) that we commit to and progress
- 4) So Human Reason has needs for the ends of all the projects that we commit to
- 5) If we commit to a project, we commit to the possibility of its end
- 6) Therefore we are always committed to the end of unity or system
- 7) We cannot see how this could be achieved unless there were a God, of the kind described by the Christian Religion
- 8) So we have two final courses of action – either ultimate scepticism (because we reject the end of unity or system), or Christian theism
- 9) We cannot accept ultimate scepticism
- 10) So, Christian Theism ought to be accepted

I will now discuss the major steps in this argument. I have already discussed 1–5 above. The move from 5 to 6 is important, and needs discussing more. It is also important to note that Temple's version avoids the problem with other versions of



the ‘desire argument’, because he does not sign up to a view according to which if we have an in-built desire for X then X can be inferred to exist.<sup>9</sup> Indeed he specifically denies such a view. In an article published a number of years after *Mens Creatrix*, Temple repeats his view that theism is the only theory that could rationally explain the universe: ‘Theism may be untenable; if it is, the universe is inexplicable. Merely to show how it fits together as a rational system does not explain it, for we are left still asking – why does it exist at all?’ (1922, 470). But he then says that ‘It cannot be laid down as an axiom that there must be some explanation of the existence of the Universe. If the existing scheme of things be internally coherent, it cannot be said that the mind imperiously demands more than this for its satisfaction’. (1922, 470). He goes on to say that it is an advantage of a view if it can explain the existence of the universe as a whole, but it is ‘not fatal’ to a theory that it fails to do this, or if the theory does not sign up to such a goal (1922, 470f). However, Temple says that we are entitled to investigate existing hypotheses in order to see whether they can live up to the goal of providing an explanation of reality. Temple’s view seems to be that we are not entitled to strictly infer that there must be an explanation of the universe simply because our intellectual practices and activities aim at such an explanation, but we are entitled to stake a claim for one ultimate explanation or another. This is especially true if there already exists a hypothesis which purports to do the job, as opposed to a philosophical construction or stipulation. Elsewhere, Temple says that what we have is not ‘one universal and unquestioned proposition with other propositions deductively established from it’ but ‘a whole system – a concrete universal – in which each element is guaranteed by all the rest, and all together constitute the whole which determines each’ (STC 39). The demand for absolute authority is said to be ‘not far from the essential sin of Pharisaism’, (STC 46f) and ultimately, we make an act ‘not of intellectual submission, but of self-devotion and dedication of purpose, being confident that what we hope is true (though we have no a priori certainty)’ (STC 54).

One more point needs highlighting. This is that Temple, in another work, claims that the hypothesis of bare theism – that there exists a God – has very little to recommend it by itself. He says that the ‘vague belief in God is not a driving or regenerative power. It is simply no use at all’. (UC 30). It seems that Temple’s idea is that the belief in what has been called the God of the philosophers is possibly of theoretical or speculative merit – because it provides some kind of unity sought for, but it is not of the best kind of merit until the idea of God is made determinate, and this is done by religion. As I said above, part of the interest of Temple’s argument is that it purports to give reason to believe not just in God, but in the Christian God, because part of the argument relies on a particularly Christian response to the problem of evil, which essentially involves the theological doctrine of the incarnation. It is to this that I now turn.

Before he moves on to discuss religion, Temple thinks he has already shown that we are, in the three other spheres (knowledge, art, morality) committed to the

<sup>9</sup> That this is an issue for arguments from desire is remarked e.g. when discussing C. S. Lewis’ version. Holyer (1988) argues however that even Lewis version does not suffer from this problem.

governing ideal of some being which has attributes not dissimilar to God – omniscience, benevolence, and so on. The religion section is largely made up of a discussion of the problem of evil. Temple's thought here is that we are led to postulate the existence of a being (which we can call God), but then the problem of evil, the 'only serious problem for theism' rears its head. Human reason cannot rest contented with what seems like such a great disparity between its idea of the governing ideal of the world and the obvious fact of sheer evil. I will therefore outline Temple's solution to the problem of evil.

Temple thinks that value, or purpose or will, is the highest category, in the sense that it is the only one which we are content to find self-explanatory, because the Good is the 'only self-explanatory notion'. (MC 265). He also says that when it comes to purpose, to understand it does not mean to explain the history of its origin, but to 'imagine oneself forming a similar purpose'. (NP 88). This is why it is self-explanatory – because when we see that a purpose is good, ultimately we can only agree or disagree, there is no further ground on which to argue. So when someone believes that God created the world out of love, or for the sake of some good, the only answer that they can give to someone else who enquires as to why this might be the case is that the purpose is a good one.<sup>10</sup> Temple's contention is then that the only satisfactory account of why the universe exists at all is because it is good that it exists, or that the principle by which it exists is love (see NP 93).<sup>11</sup> This is because will always acts for the sake of some (apparent or real) good, so if we are entitled to sign up to a view according to which there exists a being of the sort described by theism, then we are entitled to suppose that the will of God acts for the sake of the good. This in turn means we can say that 'whatever exists must either be a means to something which is substantially good or else be itself substantially good'. (1922, 471) Temple also claims that this means that because we are conceiving that the universe originated from a creative will, we also ought to accept that the most fundamental element in things is their value. (1922, 474) I take it that Temple's thought here is that because God's creation of the world stems from God's knowledge of the goodness of existence, those things that exist have some fundamental dimension of value to them. This is not to say that Temple is a realist about value, though, because he still finds realism about value problematic (at least in its Moorean form), but has a quasi-Berkeleyan view according to which value is mind-dependent, but because there is always God's creative will, which is inextricably linked to God's goodness, that it is *as if* values are mind-independent, in our ordinary life. Temple's

<sup>10</sup> Temple also remarks that this is why there is no correlative 'problem of good' to complement the 'problem of evil'.

<sup>11</sup> Thus Temple is a kind of axiarchist, though not one such as Leslie (1979), because Leslie's view is designed to be atheistic in the strict sense of denying that there is a God in the sense of traditional theism. Leslie would also deny that God exists because it is good that He does, which would be a kind of theistic axiarchism, akin to the suggestion by Ewing (1965, 35). Temple's axiarchism is limited to the proposition that God created the world because it was good to do so. Genesis 1 of course states that God saw that the world he created was good, though it does not say that God created the world *because* he saw that it would be good; the author of Genesis is silent on this issue. An account of this friendly to axiarchism is found in Kretzmann (1991a, 1991b).

philosophy, at least in its exposition in *MC*, is an extended and nuanced desire argument for God’s existence, and for the integration of the philosophical and theological tasks. Of course many of the specific positions Temple espouses owe much to the philosophical *milieu* in which he was raised, but that is not to say that this kind of argument could never work – though that of course is well beyond the bounds of this paper.

With this account in mind, we should turn to see Temple’s account of the problem of evil, and why his account (note: *not* a solution) of the problem, can be said to be in the tradition of what we now might refer to as ‘compassionate theodicy’ (see Sollereeder, 2018). Compassionate theodicy can be broadly seen as a kind of theodicy which pays special attention to the desideratum of not coldly or callously treating real problems in life as a mere problem to be solved by philosophers. That is, a compassionate theodicy is an attempt to ‘justify the ways of God to man’ by enacting the ethical life in a response to the evils of the world. Whilst Temple does not explicitly talk about things in terms of compassion, I think his view stands in an important sense in the ‘compassionate’ school of theodicy, which itself seems to me to belong to a broadly Lutheran tradition – the theology of the cross.<sup>12</sup> For a theologian of the cross, the only possible final answer to evil is to look to the example of Christ. So a theodicy inside this tradition will situate itself firmly inside the Gospel accounts, looking to how these can inform our theoretical and practical attempts to come to terms with evil.

### 3 The Problem of Evil

As is well-acknowledged, Temple has one broad strategy for dealing with this problem.<sup>13</sup> This strategy (what I shall call the Victory strategy, a sub-type of the Greater Good strategy) is to argue that evil is permitted because the existence of evil allows the emergence of goods that would not be possible without the existence of that evil. Temple’s paradigm case here, primarily for theological reasons, is victory. This can be used to account for the three kinds of evil that Temple mentions explicitly, namely intellectual evil (error), emotional evil (suffering), and moral evil (sin) (*MC* 273). Peculiarly, Temple does not mention natural evil, though it may be that he intends to account for all the consequences of natural evil under the banner of emotional evil.

The Victory strategy requires the following to be shown: that there are cases where ‘the evil being overcome, the good of the victory preponderates, and the

<sup>12</sup> The *locus classicus* for the theology of the cross is of course Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation of 1518 (Luther, 1957). It is true that Temple did not personally like Luther’s views, blaming Luther and Descartes together for the obsession with the inner or internal as opposed to external things, but nonetheless the problem of evil is discussed in terms reminiscent of the theology of the cross. It is also true that compassionate theodicy does not have to belong to this Lutheran tradition (a view which would imply that Jewish or Islamic theodicy could *ipso facto* not be compassionate – surely a mistaken conclusion), but that its core ambition can be seen in this light.

<sup>13</sup> This is acknowledged by both Fletcher (1963, 81) and Padgett (1974, 120).

world is better on the whole than if there had been no evil' (*MC* 268). The central idea is that having gone through a kind of evil (disease, say) and then come out the other side victorious over that disease, the individual (or the species) is better off for having done so, and crucially, in a better position than they would have been were there to have been no disease. Temple's own example is pain – he says: 'Pain coupled with fortitude in its endurance, especially when this is inspired by love, and meeting the full sympathy which at first lightens it and at last destroys it by removal of its grounds, is sometimes the condition of what is best in human life' (*MC* 278). The idea is that there are some kind of goods which can only be present given the realities of evils. Evils are then a necessary element in 'the full goodness of the world' (*MC* 280). Temple is clear that, at most, such an account can provide a resolution of what could be called the 'theoretical' or 'abstract' problem of evil. What Temple sees clearly, however, is that resolving the abstract problem of evil is not even half the theological-philosophical battle. The *real* problem of evil, the problem that Temple would have encountered many times in his ecclesiastical career, is the concrete, or practical, problem of evil. I shall now move on to highlight one of Temple's key insights with respect to this problem.

Temple sees clearly that the problem of evil is a problem of life, just as much as it is a problem of thought. It is one thing to show that the existence of God is compatible in principle with the existence of evil, because of the nature of the goods that will come about, most prominently the goods of victory. It is quite another to *enact* this solution in life. So the intellect, receiving the Victory strategy as a way to deal with evil, will withhold assent until assured that such a thing is not only possible but actual, and more importantly, than the actual happening could give some clue that the struggle against evil may not be in vain.

When Temple turns in *Mens Creatrix* to theological matters, this is shown in detail. We find the argument of the previous sections of the book recapitulated swiftly; the aspiration which is the root of religion could only have its goal in a 'God who should be the union of absolute power and absolute love', and so either such a God exists, or else 'the universe is in the last resort inexplicable' (*MC* 351) Then the problem of evil is raised and the Victory strategy is given, at which 'reason hesitates until it finds some actual fact of history which seems to require just that step as its only possible explanation' (*MC* 351f). This 'actual fact of history' turns out to be the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In other words, the dialectic gets us to the position where the goal of philosophy finds completion in Christian theology.

Why does Temple think this is so? There are a number of questions here. One is 'Why is it that reason hesitates until it can find such a fact of history which seems to require the Victory strategy?' A second question is why it is that the life of Jesus is this fact – that is, what is it about Jesus' life and death that makes it the paradigm instance of good victorious over evil. I shall take these questions in turn.

The first question – why it is that reason hesitates with the answer to the problem of evil – is probably answered by the fact that the Victory strategy can sometimes appear callous or unsympathetic to the actual facts of evil. It will do no good, we are prone to think, that this evil allows for some greater good in the future – that doesn't stop this current event being evil. This rests on a slight confusion. Temple's view is, in the end, not that the evil is shown to be justified by some greater good, but

that the evil gets ‘swallowed up’ in the good. Christ’s death and resurrection is the instance of this because ‘God in Christ has not merely defeated evil, but has made it the occasion of His own supremest glory. Never was conquest so complete; never was triumph so stupendous’ (*MC* 332f). Elsewhere, Temple says that God permits evil so that ‘love may be developed through sacrifice, which is at once the essential activity of love, and the means by which it wins its own return’ (*NP* 93). Evil is then permitted so that love can be most essentially love. Love is ‘never so completely itself as when it enters on complete self-surrender to conquer the indifferent or the hostile and succeeds’ (*MC* 285). The evil is swallowed up by love and made part of love’s activity, rather than a cold utilitarian calculation on the part of God to allow a certain amount of suffering now in order to provide a larger amount of happiness later. As Temple says, events in the past ‘do not cease to be evil, but their very evil becomes an element in good’ (*MC* 174). Reason then hesitates when it comes to the Victory strategy because such an account of the existence of evil requires distinguishing from its nearby neighbours.

The second of my questions is the more pressing. Having accepted that the problem of evil can be resolved by appeal to the greater goods which would not be possible but for the existence of evils, Temple thinks that we need to find an historical case of this happening. For Temple, as a Christian, this can only be the life and death of Jesus. It is by the revelation of God’s love for mankind that ‘He wins love from us in return; and it becomes perpetually more true that Love is the one principle of the existing world, as it is of the world’s origin’ (*NP* 93). The problem of evil may be solved in a theoretical fashion, by showing that the existence of evil is compatible with the truth of theism, but what we require is to be shown how it is that evil can concretely be overcome. The multi-faceted aspects of Christology are brought together here. Christ is both the real means by which God reconciles us to himself, and also a moral standard by which we ought to measure ourselves. The key for Temple lies in the fact that God does not judge us with anger but views our sins with anguish. We need to be shown the actual overcoming of evil, in order for us to be satisfied that the world is at bottom rational. Christ’s life shows us this overcoming of evil in action. Love is at its most true, its most complete, when it answers evil with yet more love, and wins over the hearts of the evil-doers. Thus Temple says that the real problem with rationalism was that it rendered its theodicy from the armchair, rather than from the position of someone who has just won a victory (*NP* 89). This is how God is completely true to his own plan – to try and force the issue (which would be trivial for an omnipotent being) would mean that our devotion to God was at root an intellectual one. But God’s way, which Temple highlights, is to win our hearts before our intellects. This is why God ‘submits Himself first and foremost to man’s moral judgement. It is by their spiritual perception of His character that He draws men to Himself and leads them to be His disciples, by that and nothing else’ (*KG* 57f).

Here we might be confronted with a problem. The issue was that we were supposed to see how the life of Jesus was a real concrete answer to the problem of evil – that it showed how evil could be really overcome. This is supposed to be so because Jesus’ life is one of love, and love consists, at the highest level, in returning love for evil. We are then supposed to be able to come to an awareness of this by

submitting Jesus' life to our own conscience, in order to see whether we sympathise or not. But this scrutiny of conscience is supposed to apply to God's nature. And we might worry that some of the events of the Old Testament represent a different side of God's nature, one that we are concerned does not live up to this notion of love.

Temple's answer to this is to point out that for the Christian, Jesus is the summit of revelation. But if he is the summit, he is also the 'criterion' or 'standard' of revelation (*STC* 13). What this means is that we measure all previous and future claims to revelation by the revelation contained in the life and death of Jesus. If they are to be found divergent from this – if they present an ideal of less than perfect love, for example – then they are not necessarily to be discarded, but treated as incomplete. The history of humanity is a history of our understanding of God becoming more and more complete. The earlier revelations, contained in the Old Testament, are because the power of God 'could only reach its own plenitude by manifesting itself in a form that men could understand' (*MC* 341). So, when we come to revelations which seem to attribute to God a different nature than the one revealed by Christ, we can either say 1) this is no true revelation, or 2) that this revelation contains truth, but has been somewhat distorted by the medium through which it is transmitted – i.e. an historical or particular human being at a particular historical moment. So Temple has grounds on which he can stand to say that we don't need to treat all supposed revelations equally, and that we can take one as normative, as it were.<sup>14</sup>

I will return to the main thread of this section – to explain why it is that the life of Jesus is the fact that we seek in order for the satisfaction of our desire for the whole. I said above that Temple's view is that God submits himself to our consciences in order to win over our hearts. This is right, though Temple has more to say. In particular, he is acutely aware that the conscience of some people will not be such as to see the moral facts aright. He here has two related things to say. The first is that by submitting himself to our conscience, God simultaneously educates it – by showing us an ideal better than we could have imagined on our own. Temple seems here to think that reason, left to its own devices, would only ever devise a morality on which people are treated according to whether they are said to 'deserve' one thing or another. But of course, this is not how Christ deals with us – he does not ask what we deserve, but what we need. This sense of God being only secondarily concerned with what we deserve – summed up in the commands to love one's neighbour and one's enemy – is I think what Temple has in mind when he says that God presents us with an ideal beyond us and so educates our consciences. The second answer he can give to this issue concerning conscience is that this is indeed how the faithful win over the unfaithful – by loving them, and then overcoming the evil

<sup>14</sup> One might argue, as Fleischacker (2015) does, that given that no text is self-interpreting, then the reception of the revelation must be in some way part of the revelation itself (117). If one accepts this account, then Temple need not be in the position of one who conceives of the OT as deficient. It might be plausible then to see Temple's attempt to see Christ in the OT, or to read the OT with the normative standard of Christ's life in mind, as an attempt to receive the revelation properly. If that is so, then Temple would have to agree that the Jewish tradition of the Talmud and related writings are also a way of receiving the revelation (though of course one that he disagrees with). I thank a referee for *Philosophia* for comments suggestive of this.

with love, because love is never completely so itself as when it wins over the evil-doer, as we have seen Temple already assert (*MC* 285).<sup>15</sup> This is how Temple reads Paul's injunction against taking vengeance in the letter to the Romans. Paul says that in returning love for evil done to us, the faithful will 'heap burning coals' upon the heads of the unfaithful. Temple says that this is a metaphor – the burning coals are those which make metal more malleable. By showing love even to those who do evil, the faithful can overcome the evil, even to the point of winning over the evil-doer.

The upshot of the discussion of the problem of evil is this: that if Temple is right, he has not only shown how in principle, the existence of evil is compatible with the existence of a God, but has shown that the Christian conception of God (as a God of love) is uniquely situated (because of the metaphysics of the incarnation) to show that very compatibility. Not only that, but the worry that this might be fine in principle but we would need some assurance that it makes sense in life has also been assuaged, because again of the incarnation and the nature of Jesus' life. This leads us to a position where we are able to say that 'we have found a principle on which, where we can trace its operation, suffering becomes a necessary element in the full goodness of the world; that in some cases this principle can actually be traced; that in others its action must be assumed if we are to maintain the rationality of the world' (*MC* 280). That is, we have a principle which we are able to recognise the truth of, and also apply that principle to the world, at least in a range of cases. Cases where we cannot apply the principle (because, say, we are ignorant of the greater good) are because of our limitations, but they are not to be taken as counter-examples to the applicability of the principle.

This is a concrete approach to the problem of evil because it enjoins us to never forget that the reconciliation of the fact of suffering with the existence of a good God is itself a sort of practical principle. We are reconciled to God, via the Incarnation, so that we can be good to others. We solve our theoretical problem, grasp the hope of resurrection and eternal life, and then turn our attention to the here and now, to put our energies towards love to neighbour, which is indissoluble from love for God. Temple therefore stands as a precursor to the growing trend of compassionate theodicy, itself a response to the so-called anti-theodicy.

## 4 Conclusion

In this paper, I have outlined why William Temple's thought should be of interest to historians of philosophy, especially those interested in philosophy of religion. This is because Temple attempts an ambitious construction of a desire-argument for God's existence, and then fashions this into an account of why Christian theology is uniquely situated to supply our deepest intellectual and practical longings with what

<sup>15</sup> It is worth pointing out that Temple thought that atheists and agnostics could count among the saved if they lived lives of love, saying that 'he may be an agnostic or an atheist, but if he has the love of men in his heart, he abideth in God'. (1914c, 79).

they want. This desire argument therefore fashions an account of how philosophy and theology relate to one another, as well as integrating these into an intellectual task of making sense both of the intelligibility of things and our practical purposes. In doing so, Temple provides a challenge to the idea that philosophy of religion can meaningfully separate its investigations from theology. In other words, I think Temple is a proponent of what Chignell (2013) calls ‘liturgical philosophy of religion’.<sup>16</sup> At the core of this desire argument is an attempt to do justice to the real, concrete problem of evil, in addition to the theoretical problem of showing how it is that God and evil can coexist. This response, which shows Temple’s sensitivity to what we might now call ‘compassionate theodicy’, ends with us enabled to have faith that God is good and that the world is intelligible, in order that we go out into the world and love one another. The full answer to the problem of evil is to live good lives. In the final analysis, our faith is such that it ‘is not won by intellectual grasp but by personal loyalty; and its test is not in logic only, but in life’ (MC 4).

## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** No conflicts of interest or other declarations.

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<sup>16</sup> Long (1981) is also suspicious of any deep division between the God of the philosophers and the God of faith.



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