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ON BEING HUMAN AND DIVINE: THE COHERENCE OF THE INCARNATION

Christopher Hauser

According to the doctrine of the Incarnation, one person, Christ, has both the attributes proper to a human being and the attributes proper to God. This claim has given rise to the *coherence objection*, i.e., the objection that it is impossible for one individual to have both sets of attributes. Several authors have offered responses which rely on the idea that Christ has the relevant human properties in virtue of having a concrete human nature which has those properties. I show why such responses should be rejected and, in light of that, propose an alternative response to the coherence objection.

1. *The Coherence Objection to the Incarnation*

At the heart of Christianity lies the doctrine of the Incarnation, the belief that one of the three persons of the Trinity contingently assumed a human nature while retaining his essential divine nature. In the words of the Council of Chalcedon,

One and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, [was] made known in two natures which are unconfused, unchanged, undivided, unseparated, with the difference of the natures being in no way removed on account of the union but rather the attributes proper (*idiotēs/proprietās*) to each nature are preserved and come together in one person (*prosopon/persona*) and one *hypostasis/subsistence*, not parted or divided in two persons, but [in] one and the same Son and only-begotten God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ.¹

Consequently, one and the same person, Christ, the Word Incarnate, is claimed to have both the attributes proper to a human being and the attributes proper to God. For example, on account of his human nature, the Word Incarnate is said to be limited in his power, limited in his knowledge, temporal, mutable, and passible; but, on account of his divine nature, the Word Incarnate is said to be omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, immutable, and impassible. Some have charged that this doctrine is incoherent on

¹My translation, based on the Latin and Greek texts in Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 86.



the grounds that it is impossible for one person to have both the attributes proper to a human nature and also the attributes proper to a divine nature. Following Richard Cross, I call this the “coherence objection” to the doctrine of the Incarnation.²

Several authors have proposed responses to this objection which rely on the idea that Christ is passible, mutable, limited in knowledge, limited in power, etc. only in virtue of having a human nature which is passible, mutable, limited in knowledge, limited in power, etc. The basic idea is implemented in different ways in different theories, as I’ll indicate below. But differences aside, what these theories share in common is a commitment to the thesis that Christ’s human nature is a concrete particular which itself has all of the relevant human properties and that Christ himself has these human properties only in virtue of having a nature which itself has these properties.

In what follows, I argue that the coherence problem can be addressed in this way only if one accepts the radical, counterintuitive implication that it is possible for something (in particular, Christ’s human nature) to be a thing which thinks, wills, experiences suffering, and feel emotions and yet not be a person. I argue that this is a result which proponents of orthodoxy would do well to avoid if they can. I then propose an alternative view which does not have this radical, counterintuitive implication about what it takes for something to be a person.

Along the way, I address the argument that the ecumenical councils teach that Christ’s human nature is not a person and yet is a thing which thinks, wills, and, in general, does what human beings do. Timothy Pawl and Richard Cross have argued that certain passages in documents approved or promulgated by the ecumenical councils support this assertion. I show that these passages do not in fact support this assertion.

2. Three Examples of the Target

To start, I briefly summarize three examples of views which rely on the idea that Christ has the relevant human properties only in virtue of having a human nature which itself has those properties.

Before discussing each view individually, I note that all three views assume a *concretist* account of the Incarnation. Whereas the *abstractist* holds that the “human nature” assumed by Christ is a certain property or plurality of properties (viz., whatever properties are essential to being a human being), the *concretist* holds that the “human nature” assumed by

²See Cross, “The Incarnation.” There is vast literature discussing this issue. For some representative discussions, see Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate*; Senor, “Incarnation and Timelessness”; Swinburne, *The Christian God*, ch. 9; Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation: Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus*, ch. 8; Leftow, “A Timeless God Incarnate”; Stump, “Aquinas’ Metaphysics of the Incarnation”; Stump, *Aquinas*, 407–426; McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology*, ch. 5; Leftow, “Composition and Christology”; Gorman, “Christological Consistency and the Reduplicative Qua”; and Pawl, *In Defense of Conciliar Christology*.

Christ is a *concrete particular*.³ A traditional view, favored by the authors discussed below, is that the human nature assumed by Christ is a concrete particular composed of a (human) rational soul and a (human) body. It is important to note that Alvin Plantinga mischaracterizes the concretist position when he claims that concretists think that Christ assumed a concrete particular which itself is a human being:

On the second view [i.e., the concretist view], by contrast, what he assumed was *a* human nature, a specific human being. What happened when he became incarnate is that he adopted a peculiarly close and intimate relation to a certain concrete human being, a 'human nature' in the sense of a human being.⁴

As several concretists have rightly observed, this characterization of the concretist view should not be accepted. As Brian Leftow puts it,

Plantinga's description of 'concrete nature' incarnation is near the mark, but just slightly and importantly off it. A human being is a person . . . The Son did not in the incarnation join with another person. To say that he did is the heresy attributed to Nestorius . . . So it is not the case that on a 'concrete nature' view, the Son assumes a human being.⁵

Rather, as Leftow goes on to say, "On the concrete nature view, the 'human nature' the Son assumes is a full natural endowment of a human being, that is, a human body and (if such there be) soul."⁶ Moreover, as Leftow rightly puts it, the concretist idea is that "someone acquires the property of being human only if that person comes to 'own' the full human natural endowment: that is, abstract-nature incarnation takes place only if concrete-nature incarnation does."⁷

In this article, I do not take a stand on the concretist vs. abstractist debate. The three views which I describe below and criticize in §3 are concretist views. However, the view I go on to articulate and defend in §5 is compatible with both concretism and abstractism.

Consider first the "Model-T" mereological view which Eleonore Stump and William Hasker have defended and which Stump and Richard Cross attribute to Thomas Aquinas.⁸ This view rests on two key claims. The first is, as Stump puts it, that "there is a distinction between a property a whole

³For discussion of the distinction between concretist and abstractist views, see Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, 41; Leftow, "A Timeless God Incarnate," 277–279; and Pawl, *In Defense of Conciliar Christology*, 34–39.

⁴Plantinga, "On Heresy, Mind, and Truth," 183–184.

⁵Leftow, "A Timeless God Incarnate," 278.

⁶Leftow, "A Timeless God Incarnate," 278.

⁷Leftow, "A Timeless God Incarnate," 278–279.

⁸See Stump, "Aquinas' Metaphysics of the Incarnation"; Stump, *Aquinas*, ch. 14; Hasker, "A Compositional Incarnation"; and Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, 195–198. The name "Model-T" is derived from Flint's "Should Concretists Part with Mereological Models of the Incarnation?". Michael Gorman (in his *Aquinas on Metaphysics of the Hypostatic Union*, ch. 6) and I (in "Aquinas on Persons, Psychological Subjects, and the Coherence of the Incarnation") argue against such an interpretation of Aquinas.

has in its own right and a property it has in virtue of having a constituent that has that property in its own right; it is possible for a whole to “borrow” a property from one of its constituents.”⁹ Thus, for example, an apple “borrows” the property of being red from its skin (i.e., the apple is red in virtue of having a constituent, viz., its skin, which is red in its own right) and “borrows” the property of being nutritious from its flesh (i.e., the apple is nutritious in virtue of having nutritious flesh).¹⁰ The second claim of the Model-T view is that this distinction applies in the case of Christ: “some of the properties attributed to Christ are properties borrowed from his constituent natures.”¹¹ In other words, there are some properties which Christ has in virtue of having a human nature which has those properties in its own right, and there are some properties which Christ has in virtue of having a divine nature which has those properties in its own right. This second claim is buttressed by the idea that what happens when the Word becomes Incarnate is that he acquires a new part, his concrete human nature, and the idea that the relationship of the Word Incarnate (i.e., Christ) to his divine and human natures is that of a whole to parts (or constituents) of the whole.

How does this help with the coherence problem? The overall strategy is “to segregate the incompatible properties into different constituents of the whole and to attribute them to the whole derivatively.”¹² More precisely, the claim is that, for any pair of properties *being F* and *being G* such that it is impossible that something be both F in its own right and G in its own right, there is nothing incoherent about something being F in virtue of having one constituent which is F in its own right and being G in virtue of having another, distinct constituent which is G in its own right. Stump illustrates the idea with the example of a C/EBP molecule: Stump claims that C/EBP is both coiled, in virtue of having a subunit which is coiled, and yet also not coiled, in virtue of having another part which is not coiled but rather Y-shaped. Applying the idea to the case of Christ, Stump writes,

Analogously, some of the properties attributed to Christ are properties borrowed from his constituent natures. So, for example, Christ is limited in power and not limited in power, but he borrows the first attribute from his human

⁹Stump, *Aquinas*, 412. See also Hasker, “A Compositional Incarnation,” 436–437, and Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, 196–197.

¹⁰The example is drawn from Hasker, “A Compositional Incarnation,” 436.

¹¹Stump, *Aquinas*, 413. See also Hasker, “A Compositional Incarnation,” 437, and Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, 196–197.

¹²Stump, *Aquinas*, 415. In the same vein, Hasker writes, “It has occurred to a number of writers that what is needed at this point is a way to segregate the apparently contradictory attributes, so that they do not need to be attributed, in the first instance, to literally the same subject . . . If there are not in Christ diverse natures to which the conflicting attributes can in the first instance be assigned, it seems that the only way to avoid the contradiction is by either modifying or rejecting altogether the attributes in question . . . I would argue that the solution to the attribute problem [which segregates the attributes] . . . is much superior to solutions which reject some of the relevant attributes, or modify them in major ways” (“A Compositional Incarnation,” 435, 437).

nature and the second from his divine nature. So he has the property of being limited in power just in virtue of having a constituent, namely, human nature, which has the property of being limited in power in its own right; he has the property of not being limited in power just in virtue of having a different constituent, divine nature, which has the property in its own right. Because the incompatible properties are borrowed properties, Christ does not have them in the same respect. And so it is no more incoherent to attribute both properties to Christ than it is to attribute being coiled and not being coiled to C/EBP.¹³

Similar claims are made by Hasker and Cross.¹⁴

Thomas Flint has also defended the idea that Christ has his human properties in a derivative or “indirect” way, in virtue of having a concrete human nature which has those properties in a non-derivative or “direct” way (a view which Alfred Freddoso and Flint also attribute to Aquinas). Discussing several examples of the relevant properties, Flint writes,

CHN [i.e., Christ’s human nature], then, was born in Bethlehem, spoke with Mary Magdalen, cured the blind and the lame, was kissed by Judas, accepted death on a cross, and so on . . . it is entirely appropriate to see CHN as the immediate, and the Son as the ultimate, possessor of the characteristics involved.¹⁵

In fact, Flint takes it to be a general virtue of concretism that one can make this move:

[C]oncretism seems ideally suited to allowing us to defend a fully orthodox Christological stance, one which endorses the full panoply of human and divine attributes possessed by the incarnate Son. . . . With both the divine Son and the created CHN in our ontological toolbox, we have the means plausibly to understand how such seemingly incompatible claims can turn out to be true, for the divine properties are naturally seen as latching directly onto the divine person, while the human properties pretty clearly are immediately ascribable to CHN and only indirectly ascribable to the Son.¹⁶

Flint’s view differs from Stump and Hasker’s view in two important ways. First, Flint expresses concern about the idea that Christ’s relation to his concrete human nature is that of a whole to a part and holds that it may be better to assert a non-mereological relation between Christ and his concrete human nature.¹⁷ Second, Flint never suggests that Christ has

¹³Stump, *Aquinas*, 413–414.

¹⁴See Hasker, “A Compositional Incarnation,” 435–437, and Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, 196–197.

¹⁵Flint, “A Death He Freely Accepted,” 5–6. See also Flint “The Possibilities of Incarnation,” 309; “Risky Business,” 216–218; “Should Concretists Part with Mereological Models of the Incarnation?,” 69; and “Molinism and Incarnation,” 202 and 207n7. Freddoso attributes this view to Aquinas in “Logic, Ontology, and Ockham’s Christology,” 304–308. Again, Gorman (in his *Aquinas on Metaphysics of the Hypostatic Union*, ch. 6) and I (in “Aquinas on Persons, Psychological Subjects, and the Coherence of the Incarnation”) argue against this interpretation of Aquinas.

¹⁶Flint, “Should Concretists Part with Mereological Models of the Incarnation?,” 69.

¹⁷See “Should Concretists Part with Mereological Models of the Incarnation” and “Molinism and Incarnation,” 190.

his divine properties in a derivative way, in virtue of having a concrete divine nature which has them in its own right. Instead, he thinks that, even if Christ's divine properties are had directly (or non-derivatively), incoherence is avoided if Christ's human properties are had in an indirect (or derivative) way, in virtue of his having a concrete human nature which has them in a direct (or non-derivatively) way.

Finally, Timothy Pawl has also defended a response to the coherence objection rooted in the idea that Christ is passible, mutable, limited in knowledge, limited in power, etc. only in virtue of having a concrete human nature which is passible, mutable, limited in knowledge, limited in power, etc.¹⁸ Unlike the preceding authors, Pawl does not invoke a distinction between having a property directly (or non-derivatively) and having a property indirectly (or derivatively). Instead, Pawl's strategy is to offer "revised truth conditions" for the application of putatively incompatible human and divine *predicates*. In particular, Pawl maintains that Christ is "visible" in the sense of having a concrete nature which can be seen and "invisible" in the sense of having a concrete nature which cannot be seen, "mutable" in the sense of having a concrete nature which can change and "immutable" in the sense of having a concrete nature which cannot change, and so on.¹⁹ Invoking these revised truth conditions, Pawl claims that there is no incoherence in Christ's being both "visible" and "invisible," "mutable" and "immutable," etc., provided that he is "visible" in virtue of having one concrete nature (his human nature) which can be seen and "invisible" in virtue of having a distinct concrete nature (his divine nature) which cannot be seen, "mutable" in virtue of having one concrete nature (his human nature) which can change and "immutable" in virtue of having a distinct concrete nature (his divine nature) which cannot change, etc.

More could be said about each of these views, but such further discussion is not necessary for my purposes. In what follows, I present a challenge to these three views and any other response to the coherence objection which relies on the idea that Christ has the relevant human properties only in virtue of having a concrete human nature which itself has those properties.

3. A Problem for These Views: Christ's Human Operations

Among the most important of the human properties assumed by the Divine Word are his capacities to act and be acted upon in the manner in which human persons act and are acted upon. Thus, for example, by assuming a human nature, the Word became capable of touching the sick with his own hands, of being moved by pity or sorrow, and of thinking human thoughts. Perhaps most prominently, by becoming human, he became capable of being crucified and killed. Indeed, a crucial claim of Christianity is that a divine person, by virtue of his assumed human

¹⁸See Pawl, *In Defense of Conciliar Christology*, ch. 7.

¹⁹See *In Defense of Conciliar Christology*, 159, 173–174, and 225.

nature, engaged in human actions (like weeping for a dead friend or touching a blind beggar) and underwent human experiences (like the suffering of being crucified) which he could not perform or undergo without assuming a human nature. On the other hand, having retained his essential divine nature and all that is proper to it, the Word did not cease to engage in his divine activities (e.g., sustaining the universe, knowing all that can be known, etc.). As the assembled bishops at the Third Council of Constantinople (681AD) put it,

We assert that he has two natures radiating in his one hypostasis/subsistence [i.e., his one person], in which [hypostasis/subsistence] he manifested both the miracles and the sufferings throughout his entire providential dwelling here . . . So, in accord with this account, we confess that two natural wills and operations fittingly come together {in him}²⁰ for the salvation of the human race.²¹

The idea that one and the same individual has both a divine way of acting and a human way of acting is part of what gives rise to the coherence objection. Thus, for example, in his divinity Christ cannot suffer (or at least cannot suffer in at least some of the ways humans suffer, e.g., he cannot be crucified), and yet on account of his assumed human nature Christ can and in fact does suffer (in such human ways), e.g., he is crucified. This raises a coherence puzzle: how can one and the same individual both be incapable of suffering (at least in some of the ways humans suffer) and yet also be something which can and in fact does suffer (in such human ways)? Or how can one and the same individual both, as God, know everything and yet, as a human being, be ignorant of some things?

When applied to such cases, the views discussed above (in §2) have the striking consequence that Christ's human nature is a thing which can perform actions and undergo experiences just like that of an ordinary human person. Consider, for example, the putative incoherence of attributing to Christ both the human property of experiencing suffering on the Cross and yet also the divine property of being impassible (or at least being incapable of experiencing certain kinds of suffering, e.g., the suffering of being crucified). Applied to this case, the aforementioned views imply that Christ has a human nature which experiences suffering on the Cross. The same holds of any other case of incoherence involving Christ's human acts and experiences (e.g., his human thinking, his human willing, his feelings of hunger, his feelings of fear, etc.). In each case, one can resolve the putative incoherence in one of the aforementioned ways only if one accepts that Christ's human nature so acts or experiences in its own right. For example, one can resolve the putative incoherence of Christ's having both unlimited knowledge and limited knowledge in one of the aforementioned ways only if one accepts that Christ's human nature is

²⁰I use "{}" around words which are in the Latin text but not the Greek text.

²¹My translation, based on the Latin and Greek texts in Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 129–130.

something which has (limited) knowledge. Likewise, one can resolve the incoherence of Christ's willing with his human will that the cup pass from him while also not willing with his divine will that it pass from him (cf. Mt 26:39) in one of the aforementioned ways only if one accepts that Christ's human nature is something which wills. Similarly, one can resolve in one of the aforementioned ways the incoherence of Christ's thinking with his human intellect "But now you seek to kill me, a man who has spoken the truth to you" (Jn 8:40) even while not thinking this with his divine intellect only if one accepts that Christ's human nature is something which thinks.

One might think that any view which implies that Christ's human nature is something which experiences suffering on the Cross, wills, thinks, has knowledge, etc. is heterodox. Consider, for example, the fourth anathema of the Council of Ephesus (431AD):

If anyone distributes between two persons or hypostases the expressions used either in the gospels or in the apostolic writings, whether they are used by the holy writers of Christ or by him about himself, and ascribes some to him as to a human being thought of as an individual other than the Word of God, and others, as befitting God, to him as to the Word from God the Father, let him be anathema.²²

Here the council condemns any view which ascribes some of the "expressions used either in the gospels or in the apostolic writings" to Christ "as to a human being thought of as an individual other than the Word of God." The claim that Christ suffered on the Cross is such an expression, and hence the council condemns any view which ascribes *suffering on the Cross* to Christ "as to a human being thought of as an individual other than the Word of God." But the aforementioned views imply that there is an individual other than the Incarnate Word, viz., his concrete human nature, which suffered on the Cross. Hence, one might conclude that these views are ruled out by this anathema.

Such an objection, however, will not do, for proponents of these views will claim that on their views Christ's human nature is neither a person nor a human being. Thus, for example, Flint writes,

CHN, then, was born of the Virgin Mary, walked along the Sea of Galilee, performed various miraculous cures, accepted death on a cross, and so on. In saying this, of course, we are not saying that CHN was the *person* who did or endured all these things. For CHN is not a person at all; the person who did these things was the Son.²³

CHN suffered and died on the cross, but the person who suffered and died is not CHN (since CHN isn't a person at all), but the Son.²⁴

If Christ's human nature is neither a person nor a human being, then there is no conflict with orthodoxy here.

²²My translation, based on the Latin and Greek texts in Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 59.

²³Flint, "A Death He Freely Accepted," 6.

Still, a problem remains. To sustain their claim that Christ's human nature is not a person, these theorists must endorse an extremely counter-intuitive thesis about what it takes to be a person. In particular, they must claim that being a concrete particular which experiences suffering (in a human way); wills things (in a human way); thinks thoughts (in a human way), including first-personal thoughts about itself;²⁵ has knowledge (in the way that human beings have knowledge); feels fear (in the way that human beings feel fear); etc. is not sufficient for being a person. But this is wrong, as Eleonore Stump, one of my targets, seems to herself claim in a different context. When discussing whether a person or merely her soul survives during the interim period between death and resurrection, Stump writes:

How could there be something which has a mind and a will but is not *somebody*? Clearly, anything which thinks, wills, and feels has to be a person in some sense of the term.²⁶

Indeed, there is some evidence that, in insisting that the two natures of Christ come together in one hypostasis/subsistence and one person, the conciliar fathers themselves meant to rule out any view which implies that there are two *somebodies*. For example, in his Letter to the Emperor, a letter which was read at and guided the Third Council of Constantinople, Pope Agatho decries those who "blaspheming, join them [i.e., the natures] through concord, [i.e.,] through an affection of the will, as if there were two subsistences, that is, two somebodies (*duas subsistentias, id est, duos quosdam*)."²⁷ If not only Christ but also Christ's human nature is a concrete

²⁴Flint, "Molinism and Incarnation," 201.

²⁵There are some first-personal thoughts which Christ thinks with his human intellect but not with his divine intellect, e.g., "But now you seek to kill me, a man who has spoken the truth to you." If we apply the aforementioned views to explain how it is that Christ both thinks this thought (with his human intellect) and yet does not think this thought (with his divine intellect), it follows that Christ thinks this thought in virtue of having a human nature which thinks it. Hence, according to such views, Christ's human nature also thinks the first-personal thought "But now you seek to kill me, a man who has spoken the truth to you." In fact, an additional absurdity follows from this particular example, viz., Christ's human nature falsely thinks itself ("me") to be a man (i.e., a human being). Now my opponents might try to respond with a kind of personal pronoun revisionism akin to that proposed by Harold Noonan (see his "Animalism vs. Lockeanism" and "The Thinking Animal Problem and Personal Pronoun Revisionism"). In other words, they might claim that Christ's human nature cannot think about itself in the first-person since, by definition, first-person pronouns refer to persons and, they claim, Christ's human nature is not a person. Instead, whenever Christ's human nature thinks a thought with a first-person pronoun, the pronoun refers to Christ (the person "associated with" the human nature), not to Christ's human nature. But such personal pronoun revisionism has faced much criticism. Suffice it to say, my sympathies lie with the critics (see in particular Olson, "Thinking Animals and the Reference of 'I'"; Olson, *What are We?*, 38–39; and Zimmerman, "Material People," 502–503).

²⁶Stump, "Resurrection, Reassembly, and Reconstitution," 156. Jeffrey Brower makes the same claim in his discussion of the interim state: "presumably, it is only persons that can think and exercise their will" (*Aquinas's Ontology of the Material World*, 285).

²⁷My translation, based on the Latin text in Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 87, 1172.

particular which thinks, wills, experiences suffering, and experiences fear, then aren't there two *somebodies*?

Lest there be any confusion, I note that this objection does not concern what is *necessary* for something to be a person but rather what is *sufficient* for something to be a person. While there is much controversy about whether having a sufficiently rich mental life is necessary for something to be a person, there is broad agreement that having a sufficiently rich mental life is sufficient for something to be a person. To avoid the consequence that Christ's human nature is a person, proponents of the aforementioned views must reject this point of broad agreement. This is a steep price to pay for Christological coherence, and one which proponents of Christian orthodoxy would do well to avoid paying if they can.

Some might try to challenge this claim by invoking the idea that no proper part of a person is a person. Indeed, in a related dialectical context, Brian Leftow and Eleonore Stump appeal to such a principle to explain why Christ's assumed concrete human nature is not a person.²⁸ In the present context, one might put the argument thus:

Christ's concrete human nature is a proper part of a person (viz., Christ).
Though Christ's concrete human nature is a thing which thinks, wills, etc.,
it cannot be a person since it is a proper part of a person and, in general, no
proper part of a person is a person.

However, this argument fails to defeat the preceding objection. If one accepts that no proper part of a person is a person and that Christ's concrete human nature is a proper part of Christ, one should conclude that Christ's concrete human nature is not a thing which thinks, wills, etc., on pain of denying the intuitive claim that anything which thinks, wills, etc. is a person. The truth (if indeed it is a truth) that no proper part of a person is a person does not provide any reason to reject this intuitive claim.

What is needed is some reason to think that something can be just like a human person—a thing which thinks, wills, etc.—and yet not be a person. One might hope to find such a reason in Leftow's argument that it is possible for something to be intrinsically just like a person and yet not be a person. In his "The Humanity of God," Leftow argues in the following way:

- (1) Being intrinsically just like a person doesn't entail being one.
- (2) Therefore, it is possible for something to be intrinsically just like a person and yet not be a person. (from 1)
- (3) Hence, it is possible that Christ assumed something (a concrete human nature) which is intrinsically just like a person and yet not a person. (from 2).²⁹

Leftow supports (1) with the following reasoning:

Perhaps I have as a part an object, Minus, which is me minus the left hand
I fortunately possess. Even if I do, we jib strongly at the claim that Minus is

²⁸See Leftow, "A Timeless God Incarnate," 281–282; Stump, *Aquinas*, 409; and Stump, "Aquinas' Metaphysics of the Incarnation," 208–209.

²⁹See Leftow, "The Humanity of God," 32.

actually a human person: that human persons have large undetached parts who are also human persons. But Minus is an intrinsic duplicate of a human person—me, in a possible world in which I've lost my hand. So it does not seem to us that such duplication suffices for human personhood.³⁰

Leftow's conclusion only threatens my claim if being a thing which thinks, wills, etc. is an intrinsic property. So let us assume that it is. But if we assume this, then, contrary to what Leftow claims, Minus is not an intrinsic duplicate of a human person, i.e., of Leftow in a possible world in which Leftow has lost his hand. Leftow (in a possible world in which Leftow has lost his hand) thinks, wills, etc., but Minus (in the actual world) does no such thing. Indeed, if Minus actually thinks, wills, etc., then there would be two things where Leftow is which actually think, will, etc.: Leftow and Minus. But surely that is not the case. Indeed, just as "we jib strongly at the claim . . . that human persons have large undetached parts who are also human persons," we jib strongly at the claim that human persons have large undetached parts which think, will, etc. Hence, Leftow's argument provides no support for the idea that something can be a thing which thinks, wills, etc. and yet not be a person.³¹

A third possible response to my argument can be found in Pawl's claim that the conciliar fathers were employing a Boethian rather than a "psychological" concept of a person. Pawl claims that, when used by the conciliar fathers, "the term 'person' is not used in a psychological sense," i.e., to mean "An individual who manifests the developed traits and abilities associated with human, personal life (e.g. self-awareness, deliberate choice and action)."³² Pawl claims that the conciliar use of the term "person" should instead be understood in the Boethian way: "*x* is a person if and only if *x* is a supposit with a rational nature," where, necessarily, an individual is a supposit only if it is "not sustained by anything."³³ In light of this, Pawl claims that though on his view Christ's human nature "counts as something that is individual and has the traits associated with human, personal life . . .," nonetheless it "fails to count as a supposit, owing to its being sustained [by the Divine Word, to which it is hypostatically united]" and hence fails to count as a "person" in the relevant, Boethian sense.³⁴

³⁰Leftow, "The Humanity of God," 32.

³¹Leftow offers another argument based on a thought-experiment involving the character Double, an individual intrinsically just like a person but such that all of its occurrent mental states are caused by duplicate mental states in another individual. Leftow argues that Double, despite being intrinsically just like a person, is not a person because Double is not all-things-considered able to do the things which human persons do (see "The Humanity of God," 32–37). However, even if one accepts Leftow's judgment about this case, it doesn't affect my argument since I have claimed only that something which does (and hence is all-things-considered able to do) the things which human persons do (e.g., think, will, etc.) is a person.

³²Pawl, *In Defense of Conciliar Christology*, 33. For a similar claim, see Cross, "Nature and Personality in the Incarnation," 250, and Flint, "Molinism and Incarnation," 189.

³³Pawl, *In Defense of Conciliar Christology*, 32.

³⁴Pawl, *In Defense of Conciliar Christology*, 33.

However, even if one grants that the conciliar use of the term “person” should be understood in the Boethian way, it doesn’t follow that something can be a thing which thinks, wills, and, in general, does what human beings do and yet not be a “person” in this sense. One might well hold that only supposit with rational natures think, will, and, in general, do what human beings do. Indeed, such was Aquinas’s view. Aquinas accepts the Boethian conception of a person but also holds that something can perform all the operations which pertain to a certain kind of nature only if it is a hypostasis/supposit with that kind of nature:

*A hypostasis alone is that to which the operations and properties of a nature . . . are attributed. For we say that this human being reasons and is risible and is a rational animal. Indeed, for this reason this human being is said to be a supposit, namely, because it is placed under (supponitur) those things which pertain to a human being, receiving the predication of them.*³⁵

As Aquinas puts it elsewhere, “whatever performs the operations of a certain [kind of] thing is that [kind of] thing. Hence, that which performs [all of] the operations of a human being is a human being,” i.e., a supposit with a human rational nature.³⁶ In short, though Aquinas accepts the Boethian definition of a person, according to which a person just is a supposit with a rational nature, he does not think anything other than a person, i.e., a supposit with a rational nature, can engage in the operations (e.g., thinking, willing, etc.) which pertain to a rational nature.³⁷

The same can be said of Boethius himself. Boethius introduces his influential definition of a person as “an individual substance of a rational nature” in his treatise on the Incarnation, *Liber De Persona et Duabus Naturis Contra Eutychen Et Nestorium*. Nowhere in that work does Boethius distinguish between concrete particulars which are individual substances and those which are not. On the contrary, he says that “particular substances [what he also calls “individual substances” or just “individuals”] are things which are not at all predicated of other things, as [e.g.,] Cicero, Plato, this stone from which this statue of Achilles was carved, this piece of wood out of which this table was made.”³⁸ In other words, anything which is a concrete particular is an individual substance (for concrete particulars are things which are not predicated of other things). Hence, on Boethius’s view, any concrete particular of a rational nature is a person. Indeed, he himself says as much when he later writes that a human being “is a *prosōpon* or person, since it is a rational individual (*rationabile individuum*).”³⁹ Moreover, elsewhere in the treatise Boethius indicates that

³⁵Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIIa Q. 2, A. 3 (my translation, based on the Latin text available through www.corpusthomicum.org), my emphasis. Cf. *Summa Theologiae* IIIa Q. 20, A. 1 ad 2 and *De Unione* a.5, ad.14.

³⁶Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia Q. 75, A. 4 (my translation, based on the Latin text available through www.corpusthomicum.org).

³⁷For a detailed discussion of Aquinas’s views on this issue, see my “Aquinas on Persons, Psychological Subjects, and the Coherence of the Incarnation.”

³⁸My translation, based on the Latin text in Boethius, *Theological Tractates*, 84.

³⁹Boethius, *Theological Tractates*, 91.

he regards being “rational” (*rationalis*) as equivalent to having “intellect” (*intellectus*) or “reason” (*ratio*).⁴⁰ Thus, on Boethius’s view, any concrete particular which has intellect or reason is a person. Hence, like Aquinas’s “Boethian” conception of personhood, Boethius’s “Boethian” conception of personhood leaves no room for a concrete particular which can do all the things which a human being can do (including in particular those things which require intellect or reason) and yet not be a person.

Hence, even if one thinks that the councils were employing a Boethian conception of personhood, that fact provides no reason to think that they rejected the intuitive idea that anything which thinks, wills, and, in general, does what human beings do is a person.

4. *An Excursus into Conciliar Teaching on the Operations of Christ*

But what of the conciliar texts themselves? Pawl and Cross have argued that it is the teaching of the ecumenical councils that each of Christ’s natures wills and performs the operations proper to it and hence that Christ’s human nature is a thing which thinks, wills, and, in general, does what human beings do, despite not being a person.⁴¹ If Pawl and Cross are right, then proponents of the aforementioned views can resist my objection by saying, as Pawl says in response to a similar objection, “I assert of CHN [i.e., Christ’s concrete human nature] no more than the conciliar texts themselves do.”⁴²

Pawl cites two passages to support this contention. The first is from the Tome of Leo, a letter read and approved at the Council of Chalcedon:

It does not belong to the same nature (*non eiusdem naturae est*) to weep out of deep-felt pity for a dead friend and to call him back to life again at the word of command . . . ; or to hang on the Cross and . . . to make the elements tremble; or to be pierced by nails and to open the gates of paradise for the believing thief. Likewise, it does not belong to the same nature to say *I and the Father are one* and to say *The Father is greater than I*.⁴³

The second text occurs in the doctrinal statement of the Third Council of Constantinople:

[T]he difference of the natures being made known in the same one subsistence in that *each nature wills and performs the things that are proper to it in a communication with the other* . . .⁴⁴

Pawl argues that these texts show that the councils teach that Christ’s human nature, though not a person, is a thing which thinks, wills, and, in general, does what human beings do.

⁴⁰Boethius, *Theological Tractates*, 84–85.

⁴¹See Pawl, *In Defense of Conciliar Christology*, 214 and 228, and Cross, *Communicatio Idiomatum*, Introduction, §2.

⁴²Pawl, *In Defense of Conciliar Christology*, 228.

⁴³For the passage, see Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 80. For Pawl’s argument, see *In Defense of Conciliar Christology*, 228.

⁴⁴For the passage, see Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 129. For Pawl’s argument using the passage, see *In Defense of Conciliar Christology*, 214 and 228.

To further support this claim, Cross refers to a third passage, another passage from the Tome of Leo (and one quoted in the doctrinal statement of the Third Council of Constantinople):

Each form does in communion with the other that which is proper to it; namely, the Word does what is of the Word, and the flesh carries out that which is of the flesh.⁴⁵

Cross claims that this text also supports the view that the ecumenical councils teach that each nature, though not a person, performs the operations proper to a human being or God, respectively.

In response, I maintain that we must exercise caution when interpreting these texts. The fact that Pawl and Cross's interpretation commits the conciliar fathers to the counterintuitive view that something can be a thing which thinks, wills, and, in general, does everything that human beings do and yet not be a person provides some reason to look for an alternative interpretation of these texts which avoids this counterintuitive result. In fact, in each case there is such an alternative interpretation, one which can be shown to be superior on purely exegetical grounds (i.e., even setting aside whether the fact that the Pawl-Cross interpretation has the aforementioned counterintuitive result constitutes a reason to prefer the alternative interpretation).

Let's start with the last passage. First, observe that, as the conjunctive adverb "namely" (*scilicet*) indicates, the claim that "the Word does what is of the Word, and the flesh carries out that which is of the flesh" is meant to clarify the preceding claim that "Each form does in communion with the other that which is proper to it." Hence, if Cross's reading is to stick, one must take the statement "the Word does what is of the Word, and the flesh carries out that which is of the flesh" to imply that the divine nature performs the acts proper to divinity and the human nature performs the acts proper to humanity. Against this, however, Leo has clarified that the individual who carries out what is proper to the divine form is *the Word*; the claim that "The Word does what is of the Word" in no way suggests that the divine nature itself does anything. But what about the statement "the flesh carries out what is of the flesh"? To make his point, Cross needs to take "the flesh" to refer here to the human nature rather than the Word who has "become flesh," i.e., taken on a human nature. It might seem that this reading is supported by what Leo says immediately after the passage in question:

One of these performs brilliant *miracles*, the other sustains acts of *violence*. As the Word does not lose its glory which is equal to that of the Father, so neither does the flesh leave the nature of its kind behind.⁴⁶

⁴⁵For the passage as it originally appears in Leo's letter, see Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 79. For the passage as it appears in the Third Council of Constantinople, see Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 129. For Cross's argument, see *Communicatio Idiomatum*, 14.

⁴⁶Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 79.

However, what immediately follows undermines this:

We must say this again and again: one and the same is truly Son of God and truly son of man. God, by the fact that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God; man, by the fact that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.⁴⁷

Here Leo affirms that the Word which “does what is of the Word” and the flesh “which carries out that which is of the flesh” are “one and the same.” Hence, when Leo speaks in the aforementioned passage of “the flesh,” he is referring to the *man*, and it is one and the same Word who is both God (“in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”) and man (“man, by the fact that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us”). As he later puts it, “[we] confess belief in the one Son of God as being both Word and flesh.”⁴⁸

Indeed, what follows this passage confirms this:

Accordingly, the same one whom the devil craftily tempts as a man, the angels dutifully wait on as God. Hunger, thirst, weariness, sleep are patently human. But to satisfy five thousand people with five loaves; to dispense living water to the Samaritan woman, a drink of which will stop her being thirsty ever again; to walk on the surface of the sea with feet that do not sink; to rebuke the storm and level the mounting waves: there can be no doubt these are divine.⁴⁹

Here there is no suggestion that the human nature itself experiences temptation, hunger, thirst, weariness, or sleep. Replacing his talk of “the flesh,” Leo now speaks of “the man,” i.e., the Word who has become flesh, as experiencing these things. And Leo emphasizes that “the same one” who experiences these human things also does the divine deeds (e.g., satisfies the five thousand, dispenses living water, etc.). There is no indication that, in addition to there being one incarnate person to whom both human and divine operations are ascribed, there is another individual, viz., the divine nature, which does the divine things (and not the human things), and yet another individual, viz., the human nature, which does the human things (and not the divine things). Instead, the whole point is that both divine and human operations are ascribed to one individual, for this is the claim which supports Leo’s overall conclusion that one and the same individual has both a human nature (since he does/undergoes human things) and a divine nature (since he does divine things).

This brings us to Paul’s first passage, which immediately follows the passage quoted in the preceding paragraph. Here Leo claims that some of the deeds attributed to Christ (e.g., weeping out of pity for a dead friend) “belong to” his human nature (*humanae naturae est*) whereas others (e.g., raising a dead man back to life) “belong to” his divine nature (*divinae naturae est*). The key question is in what sense these deeds “belong to” Christ’s human and divine natures, respectively. Paul takes the meaning to be that

⁴⁷Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 79.

⁴⁸Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 81.

⁴⁹Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 79–80.

the one group of deeds are done by Christ's human nature and not his divine nature while the other group of deeds are done by Christ's divine nature and not his human nature. But the Latin construction (a genitive of characteristic) needn't be taken this way: one could instead take the claim to be that some of the acts described are characteristic of one who has a human nature while the other acts are characteristic of one who has a divine nature. Unlike Pawl's reading, this latter reading does not imply that the natures themselves do the deeds in question.

There are at least two reasons to favor this alternative reading. The first is based in the preceding context: as we have seen, Leo insists there that all of the acts attributed to Christ are acts of one and the same individual: "the same one whom the devil craftily tempts as a man, the angels dutifully wait on as God." Indeed, the present passage should be taken as continuous with the preceding passage: both provide examples which are meant to support the claim that, among the acts ascribed to one and the same individual, some are human and some are divine. In other words, Leo's concern is the *character of Christ's acts*, i.e., whether they are all human acts, all divine acts, or some human acts and some divine acts; his concern is not which thing does those acts. Indeed, as Leo puts it in his later Letter to the Monks of Palestine, a letter whose stated purpose was to clarify what he had said in his Tome, "The actions were of one person the whole time, yet we do not by any mixing up of them confound those very acts which were done inseparably. And from the character of the acts we perceived what belonged to either form."⁵⁰ All the actions were "of one person" but some "belong to" a human form, i.e. some are the actions of a person having a human form (or nature), and others "belong to" a divine form, i.e., others are the actions of a person having a divine form (or nature).

Taken in my way, the passage fits this context. But taken in Pawl's way, the passage introduces a jarringly novel idea: rather than simply observing that some of Christ's acts are "human," i.e., the acts of one who has a human nature, and others are "divine," i.e., the acts of one who has a divine nature, on Pawl's construal Leo is making the point that some of the acts are done by his human nature and not his divine nature whereas others are done by his divine nature and not his human nature. Such an idea would not just be novel, given the context, but jarringly novel: after all, Leo has just finished insisting that all of the acts are done by "one and the same" individual.

The second reason to favor my reading concerns the specific claim "Likewise, it does not belong to the same nature to say *I and the Father are one* and to say *The Father is greater than I.*" The referent of the first-person pronoun in each is the same, viz., the incarnate divine person; indeed, it is this crucial assumption of sameness of referent that drives Leo's argument throughout his letter. Given this, Leo's point can hardly be what Pawl says it is, i.e., that the human nature says the one thing and the divine nature

⁵⁰Schaff (ed.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series 2*, Vol.12, 258.

says the other. Rather, his point must be that it is on account of having one nature (viz., a divine nature) that Christ can truthfully say *I and the Father are one* and it is on account of his having another nature (viz., a human nature) that Christ can truthfully say *The Father is greater than I*. If we generalize from this particular example to the other examples, then Leo's claim is not that some acts are done by the one nature and not the other while other acts are done by the latter nature and not the former. Rather, Leo's claim is that some of the deeds ascribed to Christ show him to have a human nature, for they are the deeds of one having a human nature, while others of the deeds ascribed to Christ show him to have a divine nature, for they are the deeds of one having a divine nature. And this is just the kind of claim we should expect, given that Leo's stated purpose in the letter is to show that, contrary to what Eutyches claims, Christ has two natures, one human and one divine.

This point is again confirmed in Leo's later Letter to the Monks of Palestine. In this letter when Leo comes to the same example, he says, "without the power of the Word the Lord would not have professed Himself equal to the Father, and without the reality of the flesh He would not also have said that the Father was greater than He."⁵¹ What Leo says here should guide us in how we understand his discussion of the same example in the Tome. But here the claim is clearly not that one nature says the one thing and the other nature says the other thing; instead, the claim is that it is only because he has a divine nature ("the power of the Word") that Christ can truthfully say the one thing and only because he has a human nature ("the reality of the flesh") that Christ can truthfully say the other thing. The only individual saying anything here is Christ ("the Lord"). There is no suggestion that one thing is said by Christ's divine nature and the other is said by Christ's human nature.

Finally, I turn to Pawl's passage from the Third Council of Constantinople. I concede that, on the translation Pawl adopts, the passage seems to imply that each nature is a thing which wills and does whatever acts are proper to it. However, this translation reflects only one way of construing the Greek and Latin (we have both Greek and Latin records of the council's doctrinal statement). One could instead construe the passage in this way (I include the full context):

We assert that he has two natures radiating in his one hypostasis/subsistence, in which [hypostasis/subsistence] he manifested both the miracles and the sufferings throughout his entire providential dwelling here, not in appearance but in truth, the difference[s] of the nature[s] being made known in the same one subsistence, *for in respect to each nature {undivided and unconfused} in communion with the other he wills and does the things proper [to it]*. So, in accord with this account, we confess that two natural wills and operations fittingly come together {in him} for the salvation of the human race.⁵²

⁵¹Schaff (ed.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series 2*, Vol.12, 258.

⁵²My translation, based on the Greek and Latin texts in Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 129–130.

Where the construal favored by Pawl has it that each nature “wills and does the things proper to it,” on this alternative construal it is the incarnate person, the Word, who “in respect to each nature . . . wills and does the things proper to it.”⁵³ On this alternative construal, the text provides no support for Pawl’s contention that the council teaches that each of Christ’s natures wills, thinks, and in general does the things proper to a human being or God, respectively.

Is there any reason to prefer one or the other ways of construing the text? The passage in question occurs in the conclusion of the council’s doctrinal statement, a conclusion in which the authors propose to briefly summarize what has come before (“Therefore, protecting on all sides the ‘no confusion’ and ‘no division,’ we announce the whole in these brief words . . .”).⁵⁴ The fact that the passage occurs in such a concluding summary means we should not expect any novel claims to be made in it; on the contrary, what is said here should be understood by reference to the preceding, more detailed discussion. So to decide which way to construe the text, we must consider the preceding discussion.

Nowhere in the preceding discussion does one find the claim that each nature wills and does the things which are proper to it. On the contrary, the focus throughout is the claim that *Christ*, i.e., one and the same person, has two wills and two kinds of operation, one human and one divine. Consider, for example, the opening statement: “And we proclaim equally two natural wills and two [kinds of] activities/operations (*energeiai/operationes*) in him which are unconfused, unchanged, undivided, unseparated.”⁵⁵ The focus here is that “in him” there are two natural wills and two kinds of activities, one human and one divine. This emphasis is retained when the discussion shifts from the two wills to the two kinds of operations: “And we hold there to be two [kinds of] operations in the

⁵³The key lines in dispute are ll.40–42. The Greek reads as follows:

tō(i) meta tēs thaterou koinōnias hekateran phusin thelein te kai energein ta idia

Pawl’s translation takes “hekateran phusin” to be the subject of the infinitives “thelein te kai energein.” By contrast, my translation takes “hekateran phusin” to be an accusative of respect and takes the subject of the infinitives to be implicit, viz., the one just said to “manifest the miracles and the sufferings” in the preceding lines. The Latin reads as follows:

dum cum alterius communione utraque natura indivise et inconfuse propria vellet atque operaretur

In conformity with his construal of the Greek text, Pawl takes “utraque natura” to be the subject of the verbs “vellet atque operaretur.” By contrast, in conformity with my construal of the Greek text, I take “utraque natura” as an ablative of respect, or what some call “an ablative of specification,” and take the subject of the verbs to be implicit, viz., the one just said to “manifest the miracles and the sufferings” in the preceding lines.

⁵⁴Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 129.

⁵⁵My translation, based on the Greek and Latin texts in Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 128.

same Jesus Christ, our Lord and true God, undivided, unchanged, inseparable, unconfused."⁵⁶

The doctrinal statement does speak of "the will of the flesh,"⁵⁷ a locution which one might take as evidence that the flesh, i.e., Christ's human nature, is itself a thing which has a will. However, the locution "the will of the flesh" substitutes for the earlier used locution "his human will" and is used in conjunction with talk of "his divine will." Talk of "his human will" and "his divine will" in no way suggests that the divine and human natures are things which themselves will anything. Hence, it is doubtful that one should take talk of "the will of the flesh" to imply anything more. Moreover, when the doctrinal statement does speak of an act of willing, it attributes that act of willing to Christ, not to either of his natures: "his willing, when he is considered as Savior, is not in opposition to God [i.e., the divine will]."⁵⁸

In its discussion of Christ's two kinds of operations, the council quotes the aforementioned passage from the Tome of Leo: "Each form does in communion with the other that which is proper to it; namely, the Word does what is of the Word, and the flesh carries out that which is of the flesh." Read in isolation, this sentence might be taken to provide just what Pawl needs, a precedent for the claim that each nature does what is proper to it. However, as was noted above, when read in its original context, it is clear that this is not how this sentence should be understood. In the present context, this is made clear by the subsequent quotation from Cyril: "We acknowledge that the miracles and the sufferings are of one and the same in respect to one or the other of the two natures out of which he is and in which he has his being, as the admirable Cyril said."⁵⁹ The identification of the one who works "the miracles" (a stand-in for divine deeds) as "one and the same" with the one who experiences the sufferings (a stand-in for human deeds) evinces no recognition of the idea that, in addition to there being one who both works the miracles and experiences the sufferings, there is another individual, viz., the human nature, which suffers without working miracles, and third individual, viz., the divine nature, which works miracles without suffering.

In summary, in its earlier discussion the council never says or implies that each of Christ's natures wills and does the things proper to it. Hence, it would be rather surprising if such a claim were introduced without further explication in a conclusion meant to summarize what came before, especially when it was emphasized in what came before that the operations and wills are of "one and the same" individual. This alone provides some reason to favor my construal over Pawl's, for my construal introduces no such jarring novelty.

⁵⁶My translation, based on the Greek and Latin texts in Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 129.

⁵⁷See Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 129.

⁵⁸Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 128–9.

⁵⁹My translation, based on the Greek and Latin texts in Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 129.

But even setting this aside, there is a more direct argument in favor of my construal. Consider again the aforementioned quotation from Cyril of Alexandria, a quotation which immediately precedes the concluding summary. Here the human and divine natures of Christ are characterized not as things which work miracles or undergo suffering, respectively. Instead, each nature is characterized as that “in respect to which” (*kata/secundum* + accusative) Christ does/undergoes certain things (miracles, i.e., operations proper to his divine nature, and sufferings, i.e., operations proper to his human nature). This is in keeping with an established practice of talking of what belongs to Christ “in respect to” one or the other of his natures. Consider, for example, the famous lines from the Council of Chalcedon, lines quoted earlier on in the doctrinal statement of the present council:

The same one begotten before the ages from the Father *in respect to his divinity* (*kata tēn theotēta/secundum deitatem*), but in the last days, the same, on account of us and our salvation, [born from] the Virgin Mary, God-bearer, *in respect to his humanity* (*kata tēn anthrōpotēta/secundum humanitatem*) (my emphasis).⁶⁰

The same locution is found in Pope Agatho’s Letter to the Emperor, a letter read at the present council and one which the council claimed to follow in its doctrinal statement:

In respect to his divinity (*kata tēn theotēta/secundum divinitatem*), whatever the Father does, the Son does the same; likewise, in respect to his humanity (*kata tēn anthrōpotēta/secundum humanitatem*), whatever is proper to a human being, the same he himself does as a human being, since he is both true God and true human being.⁶¹

In these texts, one finds a clear precedent for what is claimed in the concluding summary on my construal: each nature is characterized as that “in respect to which” Christ does and wills the things proper to it.⁶² Hence, unlike on Pawl’s construal, on my construal the concluding passage not only has a clear precedent in the preceding discussion of this council; it also fits with the ways of speaking established in past conciliar statements. This fact provides a strong reason to favor my construal over Pawl’s.

In short, contrary to what Pawl and Cross claim, there is no strong evidence that the councils teach that Christ’s natures, though not persons, are things which think, will, and, in general, perform whatever acts are proper to those natures.

⁶⁰My translation, based on the Latin/Greek in Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 127; see also 41.

⁶¹My translation, based on the Greek and Latin texts in Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 87, 1199–1200.

⁶²In the concluding summary, a Greek accusative of respect/Latin ablative of respect is used instead of the equivalent *kata/secundum* + accusative construction. As Smyth notes in his *A Greek Grammar for College*, “For the accusative of respect the instrumental dative is also employed, and also the prepositions εἰς, κατά, πρός” (§1600). In other contexts, conciliar texts employ a Greek dative of respect/Latin ablative of respect. See, e.g., the twelfth anathema of the Council of Ephesus in Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 61.

5. *An Alternative, Non-Uniform Response to the Coherence Objection*

I have argued that proponents of Christian orthodoxy would do well to avoid any response to the coherence objection which has the deeply counterintuitive implication that Christ's human nature is a thinking, willing, and suffering thing, a concrete particular which can do all the things which a human being can do, and yet is not a person. I turn now to developing an alternative response to the coherence objection which does not have this implication.

Unlike the responses defended by many other authors, the response I offer is not *uniform*. By a "uniform" response, I mean a response which attempts to resolve every putative case of incompatible Christological predications in the same way. Thus, for example, on Stump and Hasker's Model-T mereological view, whatever the pair of putatively incompatible properties, incoherence is (purportedly) avoided by noting that, just as there is no incoherence in a whole's borrowing incompatible properties from distinct parts, likewise there is no incoherence in Christ's borrowing incompatible properties from distinct natures. The same uniformity can be found in Flint and Pawl's views. By contrast, I do not attempt to resolve every putative case of incoherence in the same way. In some cases, I maintain that the putative incoherence is best resolved in something close to the Model-T mereological way. In other cases, however, I maintain that the putative incoherence is best resolved in other ways.

I begin with some cases of incoherence which I think are plausibly resolved in something like the Model-T mereological way.⁶³ Consider, for example, the claim that Christ is both visible (on account of his humanity) and yet also invisible (on account of his divinity) and that Christ is both comprehensible (on account of his humanity) and yet also incomprehensible (on account of his divinity). Here I think it best to think of the relevant properties, viz., being visible and being invisible, being comprehensible and being incomprehensible, as primarily properties of Christ's respective natures (or constituents thereof, e.g., Christ's body). Christ's human nature, or at least his body, is visible and it is in virtue of his having such a body that Christ is (partly) visible, whereas Christ's divine nature is invisible and it is in virtue of having such a nature that Christ is (partly) invisible. There's no incoherence in something's being both visible and invisible in this way. Similarly, Christ's human nature is comprehensible and, in virtue of his having such a nature, Christ is (to that extent)

⁶³I say "in something like" the Model-T mereological way because, unlike the Model-T view, my view does not depend on the idea that Christ's natures are parts or constituents of him. Some will want to deny that Christ's human nature, as well as the constituents which make up that nature, e.g., a body and a soul, are parts or constituents of Christ (on the grounds, for example, that Christ's divine simplicity does not permit him to have any parts). Such authors will say instead that Christ *has* a concrete human nature not in the way that a whole has parts but in some other way, e.g., in the way that a substance dualist soul "has" a body. If one goes for this view, it still seems that one can say, e.g., that Christ is "visible" in virtue of "having" (in the relevant way) a human nature (or at least a body) which is visible.

comprehensible, whereas Christ's divine nature is incomprehensible and, in virtue of his having such a nature, Christ is (to that extent) incomprehensible. Again, there's no incoherence in something's being both comprehensible and incomprehensible in this sense. Compare: the apple has red skin and hence is (partly) red, and yet the apple has a yellow core and hence is also (partly) not red but rather yellow. In cases such as these, it is natural to draw a distinction between being wholly such and being partly such and to allow for something's being partly such and yet also partly not such.

What of Christ's human and divine activities? I argued above that we should reject views which imply that Christ's human nature is a thing which thinks, wills, experiences suffering, etc. In principle, one could agree with this and yet still claim that Christ's human nature is a thing which does *some* of these things. For example, one could maintain that Christ's human nature has sensory capacities but none of the intellectual capacities which are sufficient for personhood (e.g., a will, reason, intellect, or whatever). However, there is little to recommend such an *ad hoc* distinction among Christ's human capacities. Instead, all of Christ's human capacities for acting (or experiencing) and the corresponding activities should be attributed to Christ and Christ alone, not to his human nature.⁶⁴

How then are we to resolve the putative cases of incoherence involving these capacities and activities (e.g., the putative incoherence in the claim that Christ is both omnipotent and yet unable to do certain things, omniscient and yet ignorant of some things, etc.)? Instead of looking to ordinary cases in which a whole has one property in virtue of having one part with that property and another, seemingly incompatible property in virtue of having another, distinct part with this latter property, we should instead look to ordinary cases in which an individual can do something with one capacity or organ which it cannot do with another capacity or organ. For example, there is nothing incoherent about a person who can see with one eye but cannot see with the other eye. Similarly, there is nothing incoherent about a person who can perceive some aspects of reality (e.g., color)

⁶⁴There are of course some capacities and activities which can be attributed not only to Christ but also to Christ's human nature (or at least to his human body and the parts thereof). For example, when Christ steps into a boat, he weighs it down and so does his body (and the parts thereof); indeed, it is plausible to think that Christ weighs down the boat in virtue of his body's doing so (and perhaps also that his body does so in virtue of the collective action of the particles which make up his body). When I say that all of Christ's human capacities and activities should be attributed to Christ and Christ alone, I mean the "person-level" capacities/activities, the ones which, in the case of an ordinary human being, one would attribute to the human being alone and not to any of its constituents. For example, Socrates and Socrates alone (i.e., no constituent of Socrates) thinks, wills, senses, experiences suffering, feels fear, etc.; there is not more than one thing which thinks, wills, senses, experiences suffering, feels fear, etc. when Socrates thinks, wills, senses, experiences suffering, feels fear, etc. However it is in the case of ordinary human beings, we should think it is the same in the case of Christ: whatever an ordinary human being and an ordinary human being alone does, so likewise Christ and Christ alone does (for orthodoxy teaches that neither Christ's human nature nor any constituent thereof is a human being).

by sight which she cannot perceive by touch. In the same way, there is nothing incoherent about Christ's being such that he can smell fish with his human nature but cannot smell fish with his divine nature, such that he knows everything with his divine nature but does not know everything with his human nature, etc.

Of course, one may wish for a more specific account of the sense in which Christ can do (or does) something "with" one or the other of his natures which he cannot do (or does not do) "with" the other nature. There are several alternative ways to fill in the details. Here is the account I prefer: Christ can ϕ with a nature n just in case Christ has a capacity to ϕ in virtue of having n , e.g., Christ can suffer with his human nature just in case Christ has a capacity to suffer in virtue of having a human nature. Moreover, let us say that Christ ϕ s (at t) with a nature n just in case Christ ϕ s (at t) by exercising or manifesting a capacity which he has in virtue of having n . For example, Christ suffers (at t) with his human nature just in case he suffers by exercising or manifesting a capacity to suffer which he has in virtue of having a human nature. When Christ suffers on the Cross, for example, Christ manifests a capacity to suffer in a certain way which he has in virtue of having a human nature; Christ could not suffer in that way if he had not assumed a human nature, for having a divine nature does not provide him with a capacity to suffer in that way. Since there is no incoherence in something's being such that it has a capacity in virtue of having one nature which it doesn't have in virtue of having another nature, this analysis vindicates the judgment that there is no incoherence in Christ's being such that he can use one of his natures to do something which he cannot use the other nature to do. Likewise, since there is no incoherence in something's being such that it ϕ s by manifesting or exercising a capacity which it has in virtue of having one nature but not by manifesting or exercising a capacity which it has in virtue of having another nature, this analysis also vindicates the judgment that there is no incoherence in Christ's using one of his natures do something without using the other to do it.

But in any case, we need not settle on a specific analysis of ϕ ing "with" a nature to see how the coherence objection as applied to Christ's operations can be addressed along these lines; other accounts of ϕ ing "with" a nature could do the trick too. Whatever the account, it should not imply that the nature itself is a thing which ϕ s. Compare: whatever the analysis of "seeing with an eye," the analysis should not imply that the eye itself is a thing which sees; having an eye facilitates one's seeing, but one does not see in virtue of having an eye which sees, for the eye itself does not see anything (i.e., is not visually aware of anything).

Some might protest that on this view Christ is not really limited in knowledge. If someone knows something in one way, then even if he doesn't know it in another way, it is the case that he knows it and it is not the case that he doesn't know it. Since on the proposed view, Christ knows everything with his divine nature, it follows that Christ knows everything;

it is not the case that there is anything which Christ doesn't know. On the one hand, some might worry about this because it appears to conflict with certain biblical texts which suggest that there are things which Christ doesn't know (e.g., "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mk 13:32; cf. Mt 24:36)). On the other hand, others might object that this is incompatible with being human, i.e., that it is essential or required for being human that what one knows is limited.

Against the first of these objections, I maintain that such biblical texts should be taken to imply only that Christ does not know certain things *with his human nature*. This is not a particularly new idea: everyone, except for those who defend kenotic views on which the Son ceases to be omniscient upon becoming Incarnate, needs to understand the biblical claim that "the Son does not know that day or hour" as implicitly qualified in some such way. Indeed, even proponents of the aforementioned kenotic views must admit that this text cannot be taken too strictly, for even if one accepts a kenotic view, there *is* someone other than the Father who knows the day and the hour, viz., the Holy Spirit, contrary to what a strict reading of the text implies.

Against the second of these objections, I maintain that what is required for being human is that one have certain cognitive capacities, capacities which follow upon having a human body (and soul). Such cognitive capacities are limited in various ways (e.g., it takes time to acquire knowledge using human cognitive capacities; we cannot sense things outside our immediate environment; some things (e.g., God) may be such that one cannot fully comprehend them with human cognitive capacities; etc.). But it doesn't follow from the fact that it is essential or required for being human that one have certain limited cognitive capacities that something which is human cannot also have additional cognitive capacities (e.g., divine cognitive capacities) which are not limited in these ways.⁶⁵

What of Christ's mutability and immutability? One might think to account for these in one of the ways discussed in §2, but such an account will not do for the following reason. Some of the ways in which Christ can change involve his human activities. Consider, for example, the fact that Christ can change with respect to whether he is experiencing suffering on the Cross: before going to Calvary, he was not experiencing that suffering; however, at some point this changed, and he began to experience that suffering. If I am right that we should reject the view that Christ's human nature itself experiences suffering (or, more generally, performs any of his human operations), then there are ways in which Christ can change which

⁶⁵A similar response can be given to the charge that my view implies that it is not really true that Christ is impassible and that this conflicts with the fact that, necessarily, anything which is God is impassible. Against this, I maintain that even if the perfection proper to being God implies that it is not the case that Christ has any capacity to suffer in virtue of being God, it doesn't follow that his divine perfection rules out his acquiring new capacities (by assuming a human body and soul) which do allow him to suffer.

are not ways in which his human nature can change (e.g., whether Christ is experiencing suffering can change but whether Christ's human nature is experiencing suffering cannot change, whether Christ is feeling fear can change but whether Christ's human nature is feeling fear cannot change, etc.). Hence, it is not the case that Christ is mutable only derivatively, in virtue of having a human nature which can change.

Instead, to resolve the putative incoherence of Christ's immutability and mutability, we should start by observing that whether something is immutable or mutable concerns not so much a particular property of the thing ("the property of being immutable" or "the property of being mutable") as *the manner in which something has the features that it has*. Any plausible account of divine immutability must permit certain kinds of changes, e.g., extrinsic changes like God's changing with respect to whether Susan believes that he exists.⁶⁶ Hence, any plausible account of divine immutability will need to draw a distinction between F such that whether God is F can change (as in the case above) and F such that whether God is F cannot change. To put it in abstract terms, God's immutability consists in there being certain F such that whether God is F cannot change. What exactly these things are will depend on how strict a view of divine immutability one has. Pretty much everyone agrees that whether God exists, whether God is omnipotent, whether God is omniscient, and whether God is perfectly good cannot change. Others go further and maintain that what God knows by his divine intellect cannot change and what God does by his divine power cannot change (on the grounds, for example, that he knows timelessly everything that he knows by his divine intellect and does timelessly everything that he does by his divine power). In any case, whatever the details, divine immutability will consist in there being certain F such that whether God is F cannot change. On the other hand, a human being's mutability consists in there being certain F such that whether the human being is F can change. For example, whether a human being is experiencing pain can change, whether a human being is feeling fear can change, etc.

But once we recognize this, the route to explaining in what way Christ is both immutable and mutable is clear. Christ is immutable in the sense that there are certain F (*viz.*, F having to do with Christ's being divine) such that whether Christ is F *cannot* change (e.g., whether Christ exists, whether Christ is perfectly good, and so on), and Christ is mutable in the sense that there are certain F (*viz.*, F having to do with Christ's being human) such that whether Christ is F *can* change (e.g., whether Christ is experiencing pain, whether Christ is feeling fear, etc.). So long as there is no F such that whether Christ is F both can change and cannot change, incoherence is avoided.

Similar remarks apply to Christ's temporality and eternity. Again, one might think to account for this pair of attributes in one of the ways

⁶⁶This remains so even if one wishes to insist that such "changes" are not changes. Call them what you will. It will not affect the points made in the main text.

discussed in §2, but such an account would be inadequate for the same reasons that such an account of Christ's mutability and immutability is inadequate. Again, consider Christ's experience of suffering on the Cross: Christ's experiencing suffering on the Cross is a temporal event; it occurs during some temporal interval and stands in temporal relations to other events (e.g., it happened after the Last Supper but before the Resurrection). If I am right that one should reject any view which implies that Christ's human nature itself performs his human operations, then there are states of Christ (e.g., his experiencing suffering on the Cross) which are temporal but which are not states in which he is in virtue of having a human nature which is in those states. Consequently, one does not wholly account for Christ's temporality if one says that he is temporal only derivatively, in virtue of having a human nature which is temporal.

As in the case of Christ's mutability and immutability, we should instead solve the coherence problem by recognizing that whether something is temporal or eternal concerns not so much a particular feature of that thing as *the manner in which it has the features that it has*. To put it in abstract terms, God's eternality consists in there being certain F such that God is eternally F. Again, what exactly these things are will depend on the details of one's view of divine eternity, but presumably they will include things like God's existing, God's being perfectly good, God's being omnipotent, etc.⁶⁷ Again, it is more controversial whether it is the case that whatever God knows with his divine intellect God eternally knows or whatever God does with his divine power God eternally does.⁶⁸ But whether such characteristics are included or not, it is clear that God's eternality consists in there being certain F such that God is eternally F. On the other hand, a human being's temporality consists in there being certain F such that it is temporally F, i.e., F at some time or over some (non-everlasting) interval.

As was the case with Christ's immutability and mutability, once we recognize that the eternality required for being God is a matter of being eternally F, for certain F having to do with being divine, and that the temporality required for being human is a matter of being temporally G, for certain G which have to do with being human, the route to explaining in what way Christ is both eternal and temporal should be clear. On the one hand, Christ is eternal in the sense that there are certain F (viz., F having to do with Christ's being divine) such that Christ is eternally F, i.e., timelessly (or everlastingly) F. For example, Christ eternally exists, is eternally perfectly good, and is eternally omnipotent. On the other hand, Christ is temporal in the sense that there are certain G (viz., G having to do with

⁶⁷Such an account works regardless of whether one thinks God's eternity is a matter of God's being *timelessly* F, for various F, or a matter of God's being *everlastingly* F, for various F. (To be everlastingly F is to be F at all times).

⁶⁸Those who adopt a timeless view of God typically hold that God eternally, i.e., timelessly, knows whatever he knows and does whatever he does, whereas those who go for an everlasting view of God typically do not hold that God eternally, i.e., everlastingly, knows whatever he knows and does whatever he does.

Christ's being human) such that Christ is temporally G, i.e. G at some time or over some (non-everlasting) interval. For example, Christ was a child during a certain period of time, Christ experienced suffering on the Cross during a certain period of time, and Christ died at a certain time. So long as the features which Christ has eternally do not overlap with the features which Christ has temporally, incoherence is avoided.⁶⁹

6. Conclusion

I have not addressed every case in which putatively incompatible attributes are ascribed to Christ and to that extent cannot claim to have given a complete answer to the coherence objection. However, if I am right that we should not presume that there is a *uniform* way to account for every putative case of incoherence, then this is a natural result. Indeed, if I am right about this, then a complete answer to the coherence objection will require that each putative case of incoherence be treated individually. Such a project requires a complete catalogue of the attributes required for being God and the attributes required for being human. I do not pretend to have offered such a catalogue here; I leave that task for another time. That being said, I have addressed what I take to be some of the most prominent putative cases of incoherence and done so in a way which avoids the radical, counterintuitive implication of the views discussed earlier, namely, the implication that it is possible for there to be a concrete particular which thinks, wills, experiences suffering, and, in general, does everything that a human being does and yet is not a person.⁷⁰

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⁶⁹In fact, *unlike* the case of Christ's mutability and immutability, it may be that there would be no incoherence even if there were overlap, for it is not clear that there is any incoherence in something's being both timelessly F and temporally F. For example, Christ timelessly knows with his divine nature that Peter betrays Christ at *t*, which implies that Christ timelessly knows that Peter betrays Christ at *t*; but it is also the case that, at some *t** after *t*, Christ knows at *t** with his human nature that Peter betrayed Christ at *t*, which implies that Christ temporally knows that Peter betrays Christ at *t*; and hence Christ both timelessly knows and temporally knows that Peter betrays Christ at *t*.

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