The Metaphysics of the Incarnation in Contemporary Analytic Philosophy of Religion

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Abstract: The paper presents the latest achievements of analytic philosophers of religion in Christology. My goal is to defend the literal/metaphysical reading of the Chalcedonian dogma of the hypostatic union. Some of the contemporary Christian thinkers claim that the doctrine of Jesus Christ as both perfectly divine and perfectly human is self-contradictory (I present this point of view on the example of John Hick) and, therefore, it should be understood metaphorically. In order to defend the consistency of the conciliar theology, I refer to the work of, among others, Eleonore Stump, William Hasker, Peter Geach and Kevin Sharpe. As a result, I conclude that recent findings in analytic metaphysics provide an ontological scaffolding that explains away the objection of the incompatibility of the doctrine of the hypostatic union. In order to confirm this conclusion such metaphysical topics as properties attribution (what it means for an object to have a property), relation of identity (what it means for an object x to be identical with object y), and essentialism and kind membership (what it means for an object to belong necessarily to a kind) are scrutinized in detail.

Keywords: the Chalcedonian dogma, Christology, Analytic Philosophy of Religion, the relative identity, the Incarnation, borrowed properties

In this paper, I am going to present and summarize the most important results of the work of analytic philosophers with respect to metaphysics of the Incarnation that has been published in the last two decades. The recent rise of philosophical interest in the topics traditionally assigned to dogmatic theology is an interesting example of an interdisciplinary enrichment, which, within the context of the post-enlightenment history of mutual suspicions between theology and philosophy, is something worth noticing. This suspicion also occurred in the early analytic philosophy: "Religious motives in spite of the splendidly imaginative systems to which they have given rise, have been on the whole a hindrance to the progress of philosophy, and ought now to be consciously thrust aside by those who wish to discover philosophical truth."[1] Given this kind of opinions it should not come as a surprise that analytic philosophy was rarely a source of inspiration for theology. Therefore, one of the main goals of my

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paper is to shed light on this – mostly unrecognized by theologians – philosophical contribution to the problem of consistency of the doctrine of the Incarnation.

One has to notice that some of the contemporary representatives of the analytic philosophy of religion (Timothy Pawl, Richard Cross) fulfil this task by scrutinizing historical theories of Aquinas and Duns Scotus or by analysing the content of the concepts used in the formulation of the dogma such as the concepts of nature or of person. However, in this paper, I am interested only in original proposals of analytic philosophers (such as Eleonore Stump, Peter Geach, William Hasker, Brian Leftow, Robin Le Poidevin, and Kevin Sharpe), whose focus is on explaining away the objection of the self-contradictory nature of the dogma of the hypostatic union in Christ.

The structure of the paper is the following: first, I will shortly present the background of the discussion on the metaphysics of the Incarnation. The main part of the paper is divided into two sections: in the first one, I shall investigate the "symbolic" reading of the Chalcedon dogma (John Hick), and in the second, the defence of the "metaphysical" reading,[2] which in this paper is represented by the so-called Compositional Account. In the subsequent subsections, I shall defend this model by introducing the relevant notions of borrowed properties, the relative identity and the dominant kind. I intend to show that analytic philosophy of religion elaborated conceptual tools that are useful in the task of defending the consistency of the Chalcedon dogma.

1. The Coherence Objections

The method of testing the logical consistency of philosophical ideas is still popular among analytic philosophers. Philosophers, who usually struggle with providing definitive answers, can finally give one in the case of inconsistent ideas. At minimum, inconsistency of a thought decisively settles the problem: a self-contradictory idea cannot be true, and if it cannot be true, it is not. At maximum, striving for coherence could be viewed as a method of pursuing truth: "human reason's best chance at truth is won through the effort of integrating our data with our many and diverse

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2   I am aware that reducing the multiple interpretations of the Chalcedon dogma to a symbolic and a metaphysical reading is simplistic, but I focus on these two interpretations due to the limitations of my paper. However, I should mention that one could also indicate a "linguistic," "apophatic," and "inconsistent" reading of the dogma. According to the former, the Chalcedon definitions provided only "a pattern of predication" (Coakley, "What Does Chalcedon Solve and What Does It Not?," 146), according to the "apophatic" interpretation, they set a "boundary" on what cannot be said by ruling out aberrant interpretations of Christ (*ibidem*, 161), and according to the "inconsistent version" of the doctrine one has to accept them while acknowledging their inconsistent character (Beall, *The Contradictory Christ*).

intuitions into a coherent picture with the theoretical virtues of clarity, consistency, explanatory power, and fruitfulness."[3] Hence, it should not come as a surprise that the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation has stood in recent years at the centre of attention of analytic philosophy of religion. It is because the dogma of Chalcedon is both loaded with metaphysical content as well as it contains paradoxical statements:

> 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/proprietas*) 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 So and only-begotten God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ.[4]

From now on, I shall refer to theology that defends views compatible with the dogma of hypostatic union as the conciliar theology, although one has to keep in mind that conciliar Christology cannot be reduced to the dogma formulated in Chalcedon. For example, the Third Council of Constantinople (681) specified Chalcedon's teaching by stating that in Jesus Christ, "two natural wills and operations fittingly come together for the salvation of the human race."[5]

According to the conciliar theology, there was (and is) one person – Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity – who has two distinct natures: the divine and the human nature which is composed of the body ensouled by a rational soul. These two natures are really unified in one person or *supposit*. The divine Son of God assumed human nature, and the assumption of this human nature leaves it whole and intact. This way of unification enables the two natures to act in their own individual ways.[6]

On the most basic level, the conciliar theology can cause confusion. It ascribes to Jesus Christ contradictory attributes such as, on the one hand, "timelessness" and "immutability" and "temporality" and "mutability" on the other. The Law of the Excluded Middle (LEM) states among others that for every object O and for every property P, either O exemplifies P or O does not exemplify P. It seems that the doctrine of the Incarnation violates the LEM, and hence the objection of its incoherence:

The Coherence Objection 1 (from now on: CO1): According to the conciliar theology, Christ is *p* and not-*p* at the same time, which is logically impossible.

CO1 states that it is impossible for one person to have both: attributes proper to human nature, as well as attributes proper to the divine nature.[7] A Christian response

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3   McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, 11.
4   Cited in: Hauser, "On Being Human and Divine," 3.
5   Cited in: Hauser, "On Being Human and Divine," 9.
6   Pawl, *In Defense of Extended Conciliar Christology*, 16–17.
7   Hauser, "On Being Human and Divine," 9.

should present a coherent metaphysics demonstrating that the alleged impossibility is only illusionary.

Since I intend to present the metaphysics of the Incarnation by analytic philosophers, it is worth pointing out that they usually do not define the nature of metaphysics. They rather characterize metaphysics by topics that are assigned to this field of philosophical inquiry.[8] There is no doubt that at the centre of contemporary analytic metaphysics stands the problem of modality of things and properties of things. The ground-breaking work of Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, contributed to the resurgence of analytic metaphysics and reintroduced the notion of essence of an object and of essential properties of objects.

Essentialism is a view that sums up the debate on modality in a context that interests us here. According to essentialism, "if something is a member of a kind, then it is essentially a member of that kind."[9] For example, if Helen is a human being, then she is essentially a human being. By definition, it is logically impossible to acquire an essential property (the fact that Helen acquires a property *p* during her life, for example, an ability to speak French, is a sign that *p* is a contingent property of Helen). If "human being" is a natural kind, then one can question the possibility of the Incarnation in the following way:

The Coherence Objection 2 (from now on: CO2): It is impossible for the Son of God to become a human being, because in order to become a member of the kind: "human being," the Son of God must acquire the essential property of being a human being, and it is logically impossible to acquire an essential property.

An essential property of the divine nature is to be immaterial or spiritual and, by definition, an immaterial object cannot have a material part.[10] We are convinced that a robot cannot become a human being because a robot is essentially electronic, and nothing essentially made of metal can become an essentially organic entity (just as human beings are essentially organic[11]).

2. The Symbolic Reading of the Conciliar Christology

One of the first analytic philosophers who responded to the Coherence Objections was John Hick. He expressed his views as an editor in *The Myth of God Incarnate* (1977) and as an author in *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* (1993). As the titles of these works suggest, his solution to CO1 and CO2 consisted in a metaphorical read-

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8   van Inwagen – Sullivan, "Metaphysics."
9   Sharpe, "The Incarnation, Soul-Free," 119.
10   Leftow, "Against Materialist Christology," 67.
11   Marmodoro, "The Metaphysics of the Extended Mind," 214.

ing of the Chalcedon dogma. In other words, in his view, the mistake of the proponents of the Objections was to interpret the conciliar theology literally. According to Hick, there is an obvious puzzle as to how one being can jointly embody attributes of God and attributes of man, and the language of Chalcedon is deliberately vague and general in this regard.[12] Hick claims that the dogma of the hypostatic union was intended to eliminate false understanding of Jesus Christ, and, as such, it does not offer any explanation to the metaphysical question of the incompatibility of Christ's attributes. Moreover, in his opinion, every historical effort to give content to the dogma was condemned as heretical. For example, the most common, traditional reading, according to which the Second Person of the Trinity assumed the human nature entails that the latter was impersonal. It follows from this that the Son assumed a human "machinery" of the physical body and mental soul, but not a complete self-directing ego.[13] Therefore, one cannot say that Jesus Christ was truly a man, and, for Hick, this means that there is no difference between the conciliar theology and the heresy of Monophysitism. If one wants to avoid this consequence and emphasises the full humanity of Christ, then one has to admit that having a personal life belongs to human nature, and, in consequence, one commits the heresy of Nestorianism. The proponents of the traditional reading of Chalcedon have to either explain how Christ's soul and body fail to compose a human person or how they can avoid Nestorianism if Christ's soul and body do compose a human person.[14] Hick concludes that "to say, without explanation, that the historical Jesus of Nazareth was also God is as devoid of meaning as to say that this circle drawn with a pencil on paper is also a square."[15] The idea of the Incarnation is devoid of literal meaning, and hence, must be interpreted as a metaphor.

Hick notices that if one says that George Washington incarnates the spirit of American Independence from 1776, one does not state that Washington's nature was somehow united with the essence of the American Revolution nor that he participated in the essence of America. One rather expresses a conviction of a unique character of the first president of the United States and his historical role in winning independence from the United Kingdom. Similarly, according to Hick, if one uses the phrase: "the incarnated God" with reference to Jesus Christ, one does not commit oneself to ontological statements. One merely points out that Jesus "was a human being exceptionally open and responsive to the divine presence."[16]

Hick admits that the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation is true, but just as poetry or Hexameron are true. The metaphor of Jesus as the incarnate God is appropriate because the spirit of God indwelled in Jesus motivated His actions and

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12 Hick, *The Metaphor of the God Incarnate*, 102.
13 Hick, *The Metaphor of the God Incarnate*, 65.
14 Leftow, "A Timeless God Incarnate," 281.
15 Hick, "Jesus and World Religions," 178.
16 Hick, *The Metaphor of the God Incarnate*, 105.

because Jesus was doing God's will. Similarly, the metaphor of the Son of God (that is the myth of the pre-existent divinity, who descends from heaven, dies to atone for the sins of the world, and returns in glory into the eternal life of the Trinity) shows Jesus' remarkable openness to God and His total responsiveness to divine grace. Christ incarnated the divine love of *agapē* through His actions (especially through His self-giving love), not ontologically. If the myth of the incarnate God changes our sinful attitudes or encourages us to respond to divine purposes, if it evokes our dispositions to serve God, then this is another reason to assess it as an appropriate metaphor. The conciliar theology is false when taken in the literal sense, but not if it is understood symbolically. The hypostatic union could be interpreted (following Donald Baillie) as a union of human action of Jesus and the divine grace that empowered Him to perform the given action.[17]

Hick also admits that a symbolic interpretation of the Chalcedonian Christology entails the rejection of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. It is because "responsiveness to God's purposes" or "openness to divine grace" are matters of degree. In principle, the spirit of God can indwell in every human being, and every human person that acts accordingly to a divine *agapē* reveals through his or her actions the life of God. "It can no longer be an *a priori* dogma that Jesus is the supreme point of contact between God and humankind."[18] It is worth noticing that a metaphorical reading of the dogma of the hypostatic union leads in consequence to the religious pluralism – a position that John Hick fully embraced but which is unacceptable for the majority of Christian philosophers.

3. The Compositional Account

The symbolic reading of the conciliar theology rests on a conviction that the Objections are accurate. It results in undermining the unique status of Christ with regard to a human relationship with God, and it rejects Christianity's self-knowledge of being an exclusive path to salvation. It is no wonder that Marylin McCord Adams wrote: "the turn away from medieval metaphysics […] has left contemporary Anglo-American Christology in shambles,"[19] and she urged for a return to metaphysics in Christology.

In order to defend the literal reading of the conciliar theology, one has to re-examine CO1 and CO2. Nobody denies that there is an element of paradox in the Chal-

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17   Hick, *The Metaphor of the God Incarnate*, 108.
18   Hick, *The Metaphor of the God Incarnate*, 110.
19   McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, 2.

cedonian definition, but observing a paradox in a linguistic expression is not sufficient to state that it indeed contains a self-contradiction.[20]

Let us start our response by addressing CO1. Is there a way to show that there is no contradiction in claiming that Christ is limited and unlimited at the same time?

3a. Communication of Idioms

The simple way to explain away an appearance of self-contradiction is to indicate that in CO1, it is not really the same subject that is the subject of attribution. This is the main point of the doctrine of the communication of idioms, according to which one can aptly ascribe existence in time to the Son of God because the human nature of Jesus Christ indeed existed in time. Simultaneously, one can say that the Son of God is eternal because His divine nature is eternal.[21] Analytic philosophers colloquially refer to the doctrine of the communication of idioms as to "the *qua* move." This is because one can simplify this doctrine in the following way: Christ *qua* human nature existed in time; Christ *qua* divine nature is timeless.

The problem with the *qua* move is that it can be applied to many different objects. For example, an apple is red *qua* its skin and is nutritious *qua* its carbohydrates.[22] This raises the question of whether the communication of idioms is merely a linguistic construct, which says nothing about the ontological realities that undergird the predication. If the *qua* move is merely a linguistic rule, then it "achieves nothing," as William Hasker[23] harshly comments, and it "serves only to muddy the waters," as Thomas Senor adds.[24] One can clearly see the problem in the example of an apparently self-contradictory object like a round square (let's name it X). Nobody would be satisfied with the following effort to show the consistency of X: "X is round *qua* circle (C), and X has four angles *qua* square (S)," because it collapses into an evidently inconsistent statement: "X is round, and X has four angles." Let us notice that there would be no inconsistency if circle C and square S were different supposits, but in the case of Christ, this is precisely the move that the conciliar theology forbids: the human and the divine nature are not two distinct supposits (persons). Otherwise, we would end up with the heresy of Nestorianism. It seems that the doctrine of the communication of idioms by itself cannot dismiss CO1. We need a solution that would show how something timeless and something temporal can constitute a whole that is something more than a mereological sum of its parts.[25]

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20   Coakley, "What Does Chalcedon Solve and What Does It Not?," 155.
21   Pawl, *In Defense of Extended Conciliar Christology*, 17.
22   Leftow, "A Timeless God Incarnate," 289.
23   Hasker, "A Compositional Incarnation," 436.
24   Senor, "The Compositional Account of the Incarnation," 53.
25   Leftow, "A Timeless God Incarnate," 289.

3b. Borrowed Properties

The standard response of analytic philosophers comes from Eleonore Stump, who was inspired by Lynne Rudder Baker's notion of a "borrowed property."[26] Stump observes that wholes can have attributes because their parts do, or as Le Poidevin puts it, "the properties of the parts can carry over to the whole."[27] With respect to the apple example, the redness of the apple is borrowed from a part of the apple (namely its skin). One can truly assign redness to an apple, but it does not mean that it is red *simpliciter*. According to the borrowed properties hypothesis, an apple is red in virtue of its skin, and its skin is red *simpliciter*. In this way, one can understand how it is possible to attribute inconsistent properties to one object. For instance, an apple could be said to be red and yellow at the same time. It is red in virtue of its skin, and it is yellow in virtue of its core.[28]

The above model applied in Christology results in a theory that is called the Compositional Account. According to it, Jesus Christ (a single supposit) is composed of two numerically and qualitatively proper parts: the divine and the human nature.[29] The majority of analytic philosophers who take part in the debate takes "nature" to signify a concrete particular or a concrete object[30]; "the concrete ingredient in the metaphysical makeup of an individual that makes it the sort of individual that it is."[31] On the concretism approach the Incarnation consists in the Son of God adding to "Himself as a part a human body-soul complex. In doing so He becomes the Incarnate Christ."[32] The Son of God assumed a full natural endowment of a human being.[33]

There are several worries to be addressed concerning the Compositional Account. The first one is a worry that Jesus Christ as a composite does not have any attributes *simpliciter*. That seems to be Stump's point of view, but it is counter-intuitive. Brian Leftow replies that there are some properties of a part that are transferred to the whole as its properties *simpliciter*.[34] For example, Helen is intelligent because of her mind, so, in Stump's view, she is intelligent in virtue of her mind and not *simpliciter*, but this is a confusing way to express the truth about Helen's character. Leftow

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26   Stump, "Aquinas' Metaphysics of the Incarnation," 205.
27   Le Poidevin, "Identity and the Composite Christ," 173.
28   Le Poidevin, "Identity and the Composite Christ," 173.
29   Marmodoro – Hill, "Composition Models of the Incarnation," 469; Senor, "The Compositional Account of the Incarnation," 53.
30   Hauser, "On Being Human and Divine," 4–5; Leftow, "A Timeless God Incarnate," 278.
31   Hasker, "A Compositional Incarnation," 434. A notable exception from the concretist view on nature in analytic Christology is Alvin Plantinga ("On Heresy, Mind and Truth," 183–184) who takes "nature" to pertain to a property or a set of properties which characterize a certain object. According to him the Incarnation consists in assuming a property of being human. Later in the paper whenever I refer to "nature" I assume a concretist point of view.
32   Hasker, "A Compositional Incarnation," 433.
33   Leftow, "A Timeless God Incarnate," 279.
34   Leftow, "A timeless God incarnate," 292.

observes that it is perfectly appropriate to say that Helen is intelligent *in her own right* as opposed to say that since Helen's nose is not intelligent *simpliciter*, then she is not intelligent *in her own right*. The best explanation for this fact is a hypothesis that what individuates Helen is her mind and not her nose, and this is why every property possessed by her mind *simpliciter* is possessed by Helen *simpliciter*. It seems then that nothing excludes the possibility of Jesus Christ having properties *simpliciter*. There is only one thing to adjudicate, namely, what individuates Christ? According to Leftow, the conciliar theology is quite clear in this regard: it is the Second Person of the Trinity who is "the identity-determining part" of the Incarnate God.[35] The Son of God is the ultimate possessor of the attributes of Christ. As Thomas Flint puts it: "the divine properties are naturally seen as latching directly onto the divine person, while the human properties clearly are immediately ascribable to Christ's human nature and only indirectly ascribable to the Son."[36]

3c. Relative Identity

The most discussed problem of the Compositional Account refers to the relations of identity in Jesus Christ. If He is a composite of the divine nature of the Son of God and the human nature of Jesus of Nazareth, then the Son of God is not identical with Jesus Christ, but He is a proper part of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, because the Son of God – the Second Person of the Trinity – is a divine person, then either we would have to say that Jesus Christ is impersonal, or commit a heresy of Nestorianism and say that there are two distinct persons in the incarnate God: Jesus Christ and the Son of God. One can present the current paradox in the following way:

The Paradox of Composition
(1) The divine nature of Jesus Christ = The Second Person of the Trinity
(2) Jesus Christ = The Second Person of the Trinity
(3) Jesus Christ = the divine nature of Jesus Christ

But on the Compositional Account, (3) is false, because according to it, the divine nature is a proper part of Christ, and does not stand in relation of identity to Christ.[37]

A rather unconventional way to solve the paradox was proposed by Andrew Loke and William Hasker. They both deny (1). Hasker simply states that the relation between the divine nature of Christ and the Word is not the relation of identity but of constitution.[38] Loke is more specific in his rejection of the identity of the pre-incarnated nature of God and the Son of God. He takes inspiration from the Aristotelian hylomorphic theory of individuals according to which objects are compounds

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35   Leftow, "A timeless God incarnate," 284.
36   Flint, "Should Concretists Part with Mereological Models of the Incarnation," 69.
37   Le Poidevin, "Identity and the Composite Christ," 178.
38   Hasker, "A Compositional Incarnation," 441–442.

of matter and form. In a controversial move, Loke applies this theory to all (also immaterial) objects, and he claims that the Son of God is also a compound of "the divine stuff" or "the divine matter," which amounts to the divine nature of the conciliar theology and of the form, which is "the individual essence of the Son that grounds the identity of the Person pre- and post-Incarnation."[39] It is quite possible that from the standpoint of orthodoxy Loke's solution causes more harm than the Paradox of Composition itself. First of all, by negating (1), we introduce four godheads in the Trinity (three Persons plus one divine nature). Second, we are forced to say that, i.e., the divine nature of Christ is not intelligent in its own right but in virtue of having the form of the Word. Third, it breaks with the tradition of ascribing the attribute of simplicity to God. The hylomorphic theory of identity was meant to be applied only to material objects.

In order to solve the Paradox of Composition in a way that would be consistent with the conciliar theology, one has to have a closer look at the notion of identity. A standard account of identity assumes that it is a dyadic relation between an object and an object (let us call this notion "the absolute identity"), but Peter Geach proposed a different account on which it is a "triadic relation which holds between an object and an object relative to a sortal concept."[40] To put it simply, one expresses the absolute identity in the form of an equation: "x = y," whereas the relative identity is expressed by the proposition: "x is the same F as y," where F stands for a sortal. This allows us to say that x is identical to y relative to sortal F, but x is not identical to y relative to sortal G. Let us invoke "the tale of a tail," that is, a famous example of cat Tibbles, in order to illustrate the problem. Let us assume that a part of Tibbles, let us call it Tib, consists of Tibbles without a tail. However, on Tuesday, Tibbles really lost his tail. If we only had the concept of absolute identity at our disposal, then the following Paradox of Identity would occur:

(a) Tibbles on Monday is not identical with Tib on Monday
(b) Tibbles on Tuesday is identical to Tib on Tuesday
(c) Tib on Monday is identical to Tib on Tuesday
(d) Tibbles on Monday is identical to Tibbles on Tuesday
(e) Tibbles on Monday is identical to Tib on Monday (law of transitivity, [b], [c], [d]), which is excluded by (a).[41]

But with the conceptual tool offered by Geach, one can solve the Paradox of Identity as follows:

(a') Tibbles on Monday is not identical with Tib on Monday
(b') Tibbles on Tuesday is identical to Tib on Tuesday
(d') Tibbles on Monday is the same *cat* as Tibbles on Tuesday

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39   Loke, "Solving a Paradox Against Concrete-Composite Christology," 498.
40   Conn, "Relative Identity, Singular Reference, and the Incarnation," 61.
41   Geach, *Reference and Generality*, 216.

(d") Tibbles on Monday is not the same *lump of matter* as Tibbles on Tuesday

(c') Tib on Monday is the same *lump of matter* as Tib on Tuesday

(c") Tib on Monday is not the same *cat* as Tib on Tuesday (because on Monday, Tib is not a cat at all).[42]

The tale of a tail prompts a solution to the Paradox of the Composition:

(1') The divine nature of Jesus Christ is identical to the Second Person of the Trinity relative to nature (the divine nature is ontically the same as the Second Person of the Trinity).

(2') Jesus Christ is identical to the Second Person of the Trinity relative to personhood (Jesus Christ is personally identical to the Second Person of the Trinity).

From (1') and (2'), one cannot infer (3).

Obviously, one could criticize that the example of Tib and Tibbles is not applicable to the conciliar theology because it consists of a natural kind (cat) and an undetached part (cat without a tail). In other words, Tib is not a proper part of Tibbles, whereas not only the Chalcedon dogma refers to two natural kinds: divinity and humanity, but also the Compositional Account assumes that two distinct natures of the Incarnate God are His proper parts. This could lead to paradoxical statements. For example, if one takes a rock from which Michelangelo sculpted "David," one can notice that the sculpture was an undetached part of the rock and conclude that "David" existed long before it was "liberated" by the artist. As a response, I would point out that Christian philosophers do not have to argue that relative identity is something that occurs in the natural world on a daily basis. Quite the opposite, Peter van Inwagen, for example, restricts the application of the notion of relative identity solely to the Christian dogmas of the Incarnation and the Trinity.[43] If that is the case, then it should not surprise us that thought experiments involving relative identity do not contain instances of wholes and proper parts. According to van Inwagen, in the world of real and objectively existing objects, there are only two instances of relative identity. If there were no Christian revelation, we would not have had the faintest idea about relative identity, just as we would not have discerned between natures and persons. But for apologetic purposes, it is enough to show that relative identity is metaphysically and logically possible.

Robin Le Poidevin pointed at the second problem concerning relative identity. It seems to him that it presupposes the concept of absolute identity.[44] For example, if one says that (d') "Tibbles on Monday is the same *cat* as Tibbles on Tuesday" and (d") "Tibbles on Monday is not the same *lump of matter* as Tibbles on Tuesday," one still assumes the absolute identity of Tibbles. According to Le Poidevin, in order to be precise, one should put "Tibbles" in context: (d^): "Tibbles (d') on Monday is the same

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42   Le Poidevin, "Identity and the Composite Christ," 181.
43   van Inwagen, "And Yet They Are Not Three Gods But One God".
44   Le Poidevin, "Identity and the Composite Christ," 182.

cat as Tibbles on Tuesday" and (d^^): "Tibbles (d") on Monday is not the same *lump of matter* as Tibbles on Tuesday." Christopher Conn, however, rightly notices that this need for clarification can come only from the conviction that Geach's goal for introducing the concept of relative identity was to replace the traditional account of identity with the new one, but a defender of the conciliar theology is not obliged, as we have already noticed, to claim that there is no such thing as absolute identity.[45] On the contrary, if one compares (1') and (2'):

(1') The divine nature of Jesus Christ is identical to the Second Person of the Trinity relative to nature;

(2') Jesus Christ is identical to the Second Person of the Trinity relative to person-hood;

then one should come to the conclusion that there is no need for contextualizing Jesus Christ in (1') and Jesus Christ in (2') because the conciliar theology insists that the divine nature of Christ is the whole Christ (one could say the same about the human nature of Jesus). Otherwise, the Compositional Account would understand Christ's composition of the divine and the human nature in an aberrant way, that is, in the sense that He is half-God and half-man.

3d. The Unity of a Person

Normally, personal identity dominates ontic identity; that is, if Helen is a human person, then Helen is a human being. The conciliar theology, on the other hand, states that with respect to Christ, personal identity does not dominate ontic identity, and, therefore, although Christ is a human being, He is not a human person. Christopher Conn says that "we haven't got the faintest idea" how it is possible that two distinct beings are the same person.[46] This is what a true mystery consists in, and this why we need revelation to disclose the divine mystery. Philosophy can assure that the hypostatic union is not metaphysically excluded but does not inform us "how it is done." In this way, we touch upon the problem that was signalled in the section devoted to Hick's criticism of the literal understanding of the conciliar theology: how is it that Jesus' human soul and Jesus' human body failed to constitute a human person? The human nature of Christ was a concrete being that thinks, wills and experiences as other human beings, and yet in His case, this was not sufficient to make Him a human person. The reason for which Christian philosophers deny human person-hood in Christ is simple: the admission would amount to the aberrant heresy of Nestorianism that introduces division and separation in Christ. But can we rationally support such an exclusion? Are there any additional reasons to deny human person-hood in Jesus Christ apart from purely dogmatic?

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45   Conn, "Relative Identity, Singular Reference, and the Incarnation," 67.
46   Conn, "Relative Identity, Singular Reference, and the Incarnation," 77.

One of the hypotheses uses the Geachean principles of relative identity. As we remember, Geach could defend the view that (c") "Tib on Monday is not the same *cat* as Tib on Tuesday" because, on Monday, Tib was not a cat, but a part of a cat. In order to avoid the consequence that if on Monday Tibbles laid on a mat, then, in fact, there were two cats laying on a mat, Geach introduced a principle stating that if a set of parts composes at time *t* a member of a natural kind, no subset of the set composes at *t* a member of the same natural kind.[47] To put it simply, no part of a cat is the cat itself. Leftow applied the Geachean principle to the Compositional Account and claimed that the human nature of Christ as His part cannot be a person because a mere part of a person cannot be a person itself.[48] This solution seems to be neat and simple, but if we keep in mind that on the Compositional Account Christ is composed of the Son of God and the human nature of Jesus of Nazareth, it has an unwanted consequence in the conclusion that the Son of God as a mere part of Jesus Christ is not a person either. Leftow initially accepted this conclusion by saying that in the Incarnation, "a human being joins with the Son of God to constitute a 'larger' person,"[49] but eventually changed his views when he noticed that Son of God is identical to Jesus Christ, and He is not just a mere part of Christ.[50]

Anna Marmodoro and Jonathan Hill showed a possible way to specify Geach's and Leftow's solution to the threat of Nestorianism. They suspect that Geach's principle stating that a mere part cannot be a person comes from Aristotelian homonymy principle that states that a proper part of a whole ceases to be what it is if it ceases to be a part of that whole. For example, if a finger is cut off from a body, we use the term "finger" with respect to a cut off body part only homonymously.[51] Aristotle holds this view because he was convinced that an essential function of a thing determines its identity, and the former is determined by one substantial form of the thing in question. According to Marmodoro and Hill, this entails that "a part cannot retain its own identity in the whole, so a fortiori cannot be of the same kind as the whole."[52] From this it follows that if Christ is a person, then the human nature of Jesus is not.

Aristotle's insight that one determines the identity of a whole on the basis of its function can also find a useful application in an explanation of the unity of Christ. The threat of Nestorianism consists not only in ascribing personhood to the human nature of Jesus but also in introducing such separation between the divine and the human nature of Christ that one loses the unique ontological relation of the Son

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47   Geach, *Reference and Generality*, 215.
48   Leftow, "A Timeless God Incarnate," 283.
49   Leftow, "A Timeless God Incarnate," 283.
50   Leftow, "Composition and Christology," 321. The previous section was devoted to an explanation with the help of the notion of the relative identity how it is possible to sustain that Christ is composed of the two natures, divine and human, as well as that Christ is identical to the Son of God.
51   Aristoteles, *Metaphysica*, VII, 10.
52   Marmodoro – Hill, "Composition Models of the Incarnation," 485.

of God to Jesus of Nazareth. Marmodoro and Hill observe that because the main function of Christ – the salvation of humanity – requires a single agent who is neither merely a human being nor merely a divine being, then "the constituents of Christ form a genuine unity to the extent that they form a whole which itself functions in a unique way."[53]

Timothy Pawl thinks that one can solve the problem of the personhood of the human nature of Jesus much easier by simply asking what the concept of person as used by the conciliar theology means. In his opinion, there is something troubling in saying that the human nature of Jesus thinks, wills and experiences without being a person only if one claims that having a rich mental life is enough to be a person. This is not what Chalcedon meant when the concept of person was used in its definitions. Going back to Boethius' definition, Pawl reminds us that a person is a supposit of a rational nature, that is, something that sustains a rational nature. Christ's human nature fails to be a supposit because it is already sustained by the Word.[54] Leftow tries to express the same proposition in a language of non-traditional metaphysics by saying that Jesus' body and soul do not have life on their own, but they are a phase of the divine life. "It is as if God the Son were a bit of 'super-DNA' implanted in Mary's zygote at conception. This DNA controls the workings of the rest of the zygote's DNA, determining the biological development of the zygote, and the further development of the fetus, infant and child Jesus."[55] The key to understand Leftow's position is to remember his conviction that human persons supervene on human natures. In this light, if the conciliar theology teaches that human nature was assumed by the already existing Second Person of the Trinity, then there was no reason for another person to supervene on the exact same nature.[56]

3e. Kind Membership

The last question about the Compositional Account I would like to tackle at the same time addresses CO2: how is it possible that an essentially immaterial and simple God acquired a material part? How is it possible for an object to acquire modal properties of members of a different kind? Leftow, who, as we could notice, generally defends the conciliar theology, is especially troubled with CO2, and it seems that he cannot find a good solution to the threat it poses. He emphasises that God is a spirit and

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[53]   Marmodoro – Hill, "Composition Models of the Incarnation," 486.

[54]   Pawl, *In Defense of Concicliar Christology*, 33.

[55]   Leftow, "A Timeless God Incarnate," 283–284. Christopher Hauser ("On Being Human and Divine," 25) proposes a different way to get rid of the counterintuitive claim that although the human nature of Jesus wills, thinks and experiences, it fails to count as a person. On Hauser's account the only individual that says or does something is the person of Christ and not His natures. Christ uses His natures to do something, as we use our eyes to see, but it does not mean that our eyes are seeing something.

[56]   Leftow, "A timeless God incarnate," 288.

that there is an unsurpassable chasm between immaterial and material things: "How could something relevantly like a soul become something relevantly like a stone? The answer seems to me: 'it couldn't.'"[57] From his point of view, one can only defend the consistency of the conciliar theology by denying that Jesus had flesh and bones and that He can be seen in at least analogical way to how we see material objects, but as Hasker rightly pointed out, such a standpoint goes against the evidence from the Scripture (c.f. Luke 24:39).[58]

In order to explain away CO2, one has to reject essentialism and observe that an object can belong to multiple kinds while having modal properties of only one kind, which Kevin Sharpe calls "the dominant kind." His work is aimed at proving that it is possible to belong to a kind and not to possess modal properties of that kind unless it is the dominant kind of the object in question. "The dominant kind membership is a matter of what an object is most fundamentally."[59] We belong to kind "animal," as well as to kind "spiritual beings," but none of the above is our dominant kind, because most fundamentally, we are human beings. Therefore, our modal properties are properties of a human being and not of an animal. In the case of the Son of God, He is, post-Incarnation, a human being, but "human being" is not His dominant kind (on this theory, the dominant kind of Christ would be "divine person"). Sharpe postulates that only "dominant kind membership constrains on individual's compositional possibilities."[60] We cannot become a robot because our dominant kind – "human being" – puts restrictions on what our compositional possibilities are, but Christ's dominant kind has no restrictions whatsoever – a divine being is omnipotent. Moreover, even if one can appropriately say that "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14), it does not mean that the Son of God is essentially organic or material because "material object" is not His dominant kind.

Conclusions

There is more than a grain of truth in Sarah Coakley's remark about analytic Christology: "the modern concerns of the analytic school of philosophy of religion diverge strongly from what we know of the participants in the fifth-century debate."[61] The main focus of the ancient discussions was to provide a clear understanding of the notions of nature and of person (*physis* and *hypostasis*), which are, as we have noticed, of little interest in the current debate. However, there is a similarity, and

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57 Leftow, "The Humanity of God," 21.
58 Hasker, "A Compositional Incarnation," 438.
59 Sharpe, "The Incarnation, Soul-Free," 124.
60 Sharpe, "The Incarnation, Soul-Free," 127.
61 Coakley, "What Does Chalcedon Solve and What Does It Not?," 159.

because of it, a continuity between the traditional accounts and the ones I presented in this paper. In the fourth and fifth century, there would be no philosophical interest in analysing differences between nature and person if it was not for a Christian effort to explain the consistency of the mystery of the Trinity and of the incarnated Word. In order to achieve this goal, Christian thinkers made some important distinctions that (as a side effect) enriched metaphysics. Today, nobody denies the important role of the concept of a person in the philosophical vocabulary.

Our current situation is similar. Christology is still being challenged with respect to its logical consistency, and Christian philosophers, in order to defend Chalcedonian definitions, provide precise distinctions between absolute and relative identity, a borrowed property and a property *simpliciter* or a natural and a dominant kind, to name the most important (in my opinion) results of the analytic discussions on the metaphysics of the Incarnation. These distinctions most probably would never cross philosophical minds if it was not for problems posed by Christology. The aforementioned insights about relations, kind memberships and properties differ from the interests of classical metaphysics, but they serve the same goal of defending the conciliar theology. It could also be the case (the jury is still out because it is far too early for this judgement) that they shall also enrich the language of metaphysics, and in this way, they will deepen the way we look at the world.

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