7-1-2013

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Recommended Citation

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The Council of Chalcedon insisted that God Incarnate is one person with two natures, one divine and one human. Recently critics have rightly argued that God Incarnate cannot be a composite person. In the present paper I defend a new composite theory using the analogy of a boy playing a video game. The analogy suggests that the Incarnation is God doing something. The Incarnation is what I label an "action composite" and is a state of affairs, constituted by one divine person assuming human nature. This solves a number of puzzles, conforms to Chalcedon, and is logically and metaphysically consistent.

I. Introduction

Christian tradition, established at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, insists that some things must be said concerning the Incarnation and some things must not be said. And some philosophers have argued that what the tradition says *must* be said, *cannot* be said coherently. Chalcedon insisted that God Incarnate is one person with two natures, one divine and one human, the latter consisting of a human soul and body. One way of trying to render this coherent is to portray the Incarnation as a sort of composite—the Word *plus* the assumed human nature. But this composite theory has recently come under attack.[1] The criticism is aimed at attempts to see God Incarnate as a composite person. But the person who is the Word—though He *has* two natures when Incarnate—cannot possibly be a composite person. Here I defend a new composite theory using the analogy of a boy playing a video game. The analogy suggests a way of thinking about the Incarnation as what I will label an "action composite" which conforms to Chalcedon and is logically and metaphysically consistent.

Chalcedon describes the Incarnation this way:

> [W]e all with one voice teach the confession of one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man, of a rational soul and a body; consubstantial with the Father as regards his divinity, and the same consubstantial with us as regards his humanity; like us in all respects except for sin; begotten before the ages from the Father as regards his divinity, and in the last days

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[1]Robin Le Poidevin, "Identity and the Composite Christ; An Incarnational Dilemma," *Religious Studies* 45 (2009), 167–186; Thomas Senor, "The Compositional Account of the Incarnation," *Faith and Philosophy* 24 (2007), 52–71.

the same for us and for our salvation from Mary, the virgin God-bearer as regards his humanity; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation; at no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union, but rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person and a single subsistent being; he is not parted or divided into two persons, but is one and the same only-begotten Son, God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ.[2]

How could a single person have a divine and a human nature? Don't humanity and divinity possess opposing properties? A standard move is to attribute some properties to Christ as divine and some as human.[3] So Christ is x *qua* God, but not-x, *qua* man. And one way to elaborate is to propose that God Incarnate is (something like) a composite. Call the Second Person of the Trinity, thought of as temporally (*quoad nos*) or causally or logically preceding the Incarnation, "W" for Word. W assumes human nature by "adding" on to Himself a human body and soul. Call the composite of the Word assuming the human soul and body, the Word Incarnate or WI. The composite, WI, consists of (at least) two concrete particulars, W and the organic unity of the human soul and body. Let H stand for this organic unity.[4]

In many cases of composites there is nothing puzzling in saying, "this part is x, and this part is not-x." A ball may be half white and half black. Sometimes we say of a composite whole that it is x because a part of it is x. An apple is "red" even though the flesh is white. Can we solve the puzzle about opposing properties in WI by appealing to its composite status? So we might say that the divine part is omniscient and the human part not-omniscient. But there is only one person in WI, and critics argue that the composite proposal fails to do justice to Chalcedon. Both critics and defenders have tended to appeal to examples drawn from material composites in setting out and criticizing the theory. I propose that examining a different sort of composite, an action composite, provides a better (though very distant) analogy for the Incarnation, one which is not susceptible to the recent criticisms.

II. A Video Game Analogy

The composite is Nick Playing (NP), a boy playing a video game.[5] Nick (N), the actual boy sitting in front of the screen, is analogous to W. He is playing a character—a moving human-shaped image on the screen—which we can call "Nick's Character" (NC). NC is analogous to H, the

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[2]Available at http://www.piar.hu/councils/ecum04.htm.

[3]See the letter of Pope Leo the Great which is attached as an addendum to the Council's statement. Latin text can be found in the *Patrologia Latina Cursus Completus* Vol. 54, 755–782.

[4]The Christian tradition insists on the union of soul and body in the human person, so best to consider soul and body one thing.

[5]I proposed this in "Incarnation" in *Christian Philosophical Theology*, ed. Charles Taliaferro and Chad Meister (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 95–107.

human body and soul of WI. Nick's activity of "playing" is analogous to the divine act of "assuming." Nick's game is a First Person Player game where the player sees the action in the first person, for example seeing only his own virtual arms and hands and (occasionally) feet and legs. If there are other players, they see the character from a third person perspective as a whole figure. NP, then, is N playing NC, and is analogous to WI.

Is NP just an updated version of JM, Jim Marionetting (if that is the word I want)? Not at all. As I defend the video game analogy, I will point out multiple ways in which NP is helpful where JM is not. To my knowledge, our predecessors did not adopt anything like a JM analogy, and it will be easy to see why.[6] There is one obvious difference that it will be well to mention here at the beginning. Jim's marionette is a three-dimensional object in our physical world. NC exists in what may be thought of as a different world, Nick's Game World (NGW). NGW is an intelligently designed system which is constituted by a set of mutually consistent rules, different from the natural laws which govern our physical universe, and different from those governing other video games. NGW is not entirely self-contained, in that it can be accessed from outside, but only by beings who exist on the same plane and with much of the same knowledge and many of the same abilities as the makers of the game. NGW does exist within our physical world, but the "objects" in it, the characters, the trees, the weaponry, are two-dimensional. Splendid as NGW may be, it is incomparably less rich—less complex, less detailed, less full of being—than our physical world. So NGW is a created world in which its makers can act, but which has a "thinner" sort of existence than its makers and the world they inhabit. In thinking about the Incarnation, NGW serves as an analogy for our physical world. NP can act in NGW as NC, and WI can act in the physical world as H. The stage "world" of the marionette is just a part of our three-dimensional world. So NGW makes a much better analogy than the puppet stage for our physical world in relationship to God, and NP makes a better analogy than JM.

Before developing the analogy, two preliminary points: First, it might be objected that NP is not sufficiently unified to count as a composite whole. But mereologists have achieved no consensus on how much of what sort of unity—if any—it takes to be one being. I do not propose any overarching mereological theories, but rather say just enough to motivate my analogy and defend my composite theory. My guiding principle is that any mereological claim that entails the falsehood of the Chalcedonian statement is to be rejected. Assuming Chalcedonian Christology, something which is one in terms of being a person can have two radically different and separate natures. NP has a sort of unity, to be discussed below, and for purposes of the analogy, it should prove sufficient. Secondly, NP—Nick *playing* NC—

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[6]Richard Cross, the author of *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) in correspondence supports my impression that the Medievals, at least, did not propose the puppet analogy.

is better labeled a state of affairs than a person or an object. If the analogy is apt, this suggests that the Incarnation is properly thought of as (or as something like) a state of affairs. So if the Incarnation is to be thought of as a composite, it is not a composite person or a composite object. It is a composite state of affairs composed of the concrete particulars W and H, and also the features they exhibit, and the relations among them.

The analogy suggests at least six important points which contemporary literature on the metaphysics of the Incarnation often fails to appreciate.[7] First, the analogy appeals to a composite involving a *person*, which is useful in that the Chalcedonian issue is whether or not a single *person* can be the main constituent of a composite with two natures.[8] Secondly, the divine and human natures, dimly reflected in the actual boy and the video game character, occupy different "orders" of being. N is far less limited than NC, which exists only as the character played by N and so is utterly dependent on N. By "utterly dependent" I mean more than that NC could not be part of NP without N and that NC could not be doing what it is doing if it were not part of NP. NC is a first-person character and so would not exist *at all* if it were not part of NP. In this, NC is quite unlike N, who exists whether playing or not. Thus the analogy (distantly) mirrors the classical theism which undergirds Chalcedon; there is a radical difference in the ontological status of God and the human being. God is the absolute Existent on which all else depends, such that creatures have a "thin" and reflected sort of being. Those who eschew that language can still appreciate the radical difference between God, the source of all, Who keeps everything that is not Himself in being from moment to moment, and the creature which exists in absolute dependence on the Creator. Here we see one reason why JM fails as an analogy. M, the marionette, exists as a separate, three-dimensional object in the physical world just the same way that J, the man, does. The marionette exists in the same way even when it sits on the shelf and no one is using it. M is not utterly dependent on J, and the relationship between J and M does not point towards existence in different orders of being. But the two-dimensionality and the utter dependence of NC on N suggest the radical ontological separation of God and man.

The ontological distance is helpful in seeing how two things can be one. Two things occupying the same "order of being" must be distinguished within that same order, and thus their "twoness" seems less amenable to allowing the sort of interrelationship which the Incarnation suggests. If we posit two boys playing video games, and then propose that the two boys are

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[7]Some of the following points are mentioned briefly in my "An Anselmian Defense of the Incarnation" in *Debating Christian Theism*, ed. Chad Meister, J. P. Moreland, and Khaldoun Swies, forthcoming from Oxford University Press

[8]The council's term was the Greek *hypostasis*, translated as *persona* in Latin. The term connotes something a bit thinner, especially in terms of psychology, than does the contemporary use of "person." For the meaning of "hypostasis" in the Chalcedonian context see Brian E. Daley, SJ, "Nature and the 'Mode of Union': Late Patristic Models for the Personal Unity of Christ" in *The Incarnation*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Danial Kendall, SJ, and Gerald O'Collins, SJ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 164–196.

really one being, we must reconcile the unity with whatever individuated the two. Nick and his friend DJ are each constituted by the organic unity of a human soul and body. What grounds their being individuals distinct from one another is something about (or present in or attached to) their each being a human soul and body. If we say that they are somehow really one Nick-DJ being, we need to show how the ordinarily-individuating-something is inoperant in this case. And the same for JM. With two obviously discreet "parts" of the same order of being—two physical objects—it is difficult to see how JM could achieve the sort of unity required for an apt analogy for WI. (More on this below.)[9] In NP as in WI we do not have this difficulty.

Thirdly, based on the ontological distance and the dependence relationship, there is a thoroughgoing causal asymmetry regarding the two particulars in WI which is reflected in NP. W is He "through Whom all things are made." Classical theism holds that everything that exists, including H, is caused immediately by W. In NP, NC is a first-person character, so NC exists and does what it does only because it is being played by N. If W were (*per impossibile*) to stop causing H, H would blink out of being. And if N stops playing NC, NC does not exist. Again, JM fails. M does not depend causally upon J for its existence from moment to moment. J might cease to exist and M could be unaffected.

Of course, there is an important disanalogy between N and W as causes. Unlike W, N must make use of all sorts of things outside himself and independent of his causal activity in order to play NC. The video game analogy can be improved if we add that N is the master of the game. He can turn it on and off, and can change, including adding and subtracting, elements in the game almost at will. But even still N must use all the equipment. And even if he could dispense with the physical equipment and exercise his mastery in the game simply by wishing, he would still be operating with preexistent concepts of things which exist independently of N. W is different. Classical theism as represented by Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas, has it that there are no concrete beings and no abstracta (no necessary propositions, Middle Knowledge, or whatever) independent of God's nature and will. All necessary truth exists as an "extension" of the nature of God. All contingent things (with the possible exception of human choices) exist because they are willed to do so by God. God is an absolute creator. The most brilliant human "creator" is just rearranging what is given in the world. So N's causal efficacy is just the barest reflection of W's. Still NP succeeds in pointing out an important aspect of the Incarnation which is that one part of the composite is utterly causally dependent on the other.

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[9]Perhaps it can be done. Ockham, apparently, held that each and every created substance of one kind "has the metaphysical possibility of being an 'alien' supposit for a created individual substance nature of another kind." Marilyn McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 135. But the thought that Socrates might take on cow nature and be "inbovined" is deeply puzzling.

Regarding the causal asymmetry in the parts of NP and WI, it should be noted that N's behavior regarding playing the game, even if we suppose that N brings NC into being just by wishing, is circumscribed by the nature of NC. So, for example, if NC has a virtual human body, it can run and shoot a gun in NGW. But NC cannot both remain NC and step out of the screen. It cannot be a virtual bomb to be exploded on a virtual target. N could replace NC with a bomb, but the bomb is not the same thing NC is. That means that there is some mutual causal interdependence between N and NC. N's actions involving NC are somewhat limited by the nature of NC. The same is true of W and H in WI. The H part of WI cannot be what it is if it does not conform to human properties. So W's willing is limited regarding H. But N's limitations regarding NC come ultimately from outside of himself. Even if N brings NGW and NC into being by wishing, N must nonetheless wish for the instantiation of preexistent natures, properties, and relations which are not dependent upon him. God is an absolute creator. If He chooses to become incarnate, then He is choosing to limit Himself in ways which all ultimately depend upon Him. So the causal asymmetry in the two parts of WI is more complete than in NP.

Fourth, the analogy underscores the important point that the Incarnation is God *doing* something. NP is an "action composite." It is a composite in that it involves at least two concrete particulars, N and NC. But it is unified in that NC is a necessary element in the agent N's doing what he is doing. So an action composite has one particular which is an agent and another particular (or other particulars—we will stick with one other for simplicity's sake) which are distinguishable from the agent, through which the agent is doing what he is doing. To clarify, take a different action composite, the aforementioned Jim Marionetting. If Jim is asleep and the marionette is sitting on a shelf, there is no JM. There is no marionetting going on, so no Jim Marionetting. Some mereologists hold that any combination of things can be an object. If so, J sleeping and M sitting on a shelf can together constitute an object, but this object is not JM. This extremely liberal mereology strikes me as counterintuitive, but in any case, it seems safe to say that, whether or not Jim asleep and the marionette on a shelf constitute an object, the action composite, JM, is significantly more unified. It is characterized by an obvious principle of unity in that it is the marionette's presence as the kind of thing it is which allows Jim to engage in the action which is required for the being of JM. M in JM is integrally related to J's activity in a way that M on a shelf is not. Though note that, given the point above about different orders of being, it seems right to say that JM is a less unified composite being than NP. J and M are of the same order of being. They both exist as three-dimensional beings in our physical universe, and M can exist without being part of JM, so M and J seem less unified in JM than NC and N in NP.

If WI is (or is like) a composite, it is not a composite where the two parts can equally "sit there" like a cat with its tail. W engages in (in fact, on traditional Classical theism, He *is*) the pure act which keeps all things,

including H, in being from moment to moment. In the simple act by which God does all He does, W causes the existence of all there is *and*—a different aspect of that one act—assumes H. To underscore, the Incarnation is the Word *doing* something. An action composite like NP or WI is a composite state of affairs which comes into being due to the action of an agent. It is appropriate, then, to say that the agent is the *main* constituent of the state of affairs. Nick is the main constituent of Nick Playing and the Word is the main constituent of the Word Incarnate.

Fifth, given that NC is N's first-person character, NC exists only when N is playing it and only *as* the first-person character N is playing. (DJ cannot "take over" the character. If DJ plays a first-person character it is DJC, not NC.) There may be other characters in the game played by other actual human beings, or characters that exist as non-playable characters—characters which exist in the game but cannot be controlled by any actual human players. But NC just *is* the character N is playing. Talk of what NC would be and do were N not playing it is simply incoherent. So NC is unlike the marionette which can exist with or without JM. Again, NP is a more unified composite than JM. If NC is not part of NP, NC does not exist in any way at all. Analogously, H exists only as the human nature of WI.

In the contemporary literature it is sometimes supposed that there is some separate and discreet preexistent human individual which the Word adds to Himself. But no. That has unacceptable consequences. However we develop the relevant notion of personhood, at the very least, in the context of classical and medieval philosophy, it is a principle of individuality. If P is a person, and then loses his personhood (whatever that may mean), then P ceases to be the individual that he was and this would constitute a genuine loss. So if W were to assume a preexistent person, that would mean either that there are now two persons in the Incarnation, or that this separate individual, a "suppositum," the ultimate subject of properties, was destroyed by being assumed.[10] Even discussion of what status the human body and soul would have if they were not assumed is incoherent. H just is the human soul and body assumed by the Word and existing as part of WI. Yes, other human persons are constituted by a soul and body, but it does not follow that H in WI is, or even could be, a person or anything at all, distinct from WI.[11]

This leads to a sixth advantage. NC serves as a representative or expression of N in NGW. If DJ is playing a character, it is possible that from some perspectives—that of an onlooker in the real world who can see only the screen or, to adopt a fantasy hypothesis, of another character in NGW—it

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[10]The latter is Thomas Aquinas's argument in *ST* III, q.4, art.5.

[11]This point also counts against the Molinist approach in which a possible person who is the subject of true counterfactuals of freedom might or might not be "assumed" by the Word. See Thomas P. Flint, "Molinism and Incarnation," in *Molinism: The Contemporary Debate*, ed. Ken Perszyk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 187–207. A discussion of this issue lies outside the scope of the present paper.

appears to be the same character as NC. But it is not. If DJ is playing a first-person character, then, even if he is playing it in NGW, the game world designed and produced by Nick, DJ can play only DJC, an expression or representative of DJ. With the Incarnation, H is all that is perceivable to the human beings fortunate enough to come into physical contact with that part of WI. But H, as part of WI, should be understood to express or represent W. The thought is that our physical world is so limited that, in order to reach us and address us in a special way, as one of us, W enters into physical creation as WI. This underscores again the weakness of JM as an analogy. Jim and his marionette are always equally and only present in the physical world. There is no issue of J entering into a world with different properties in order to address his audience in a way which would otherwise be impossible. If J wants to talk to the audience face to face, he can just jump onto the stage. Of course, God can speak out of a burning bush or in all sorts of ways large and small. But if He wants to address us as a fellow citizen of our world, then Incarnation looks to be the move to make. And so the NP analogy is valuable. N as NP enters NGW through NC. Neat.

III. *Defending the Composite*

With the analogy spelled out, we can turn to the recent criticisms of the composite theory to see if my suggestion of WI as an action composite can withstand them. (The following is not intended to criticize the arguments of Senor and LePoidevin insofar as they address the standard composite theory that holds that God Incarnate is (like) a composite object or person. My hope is that my proposal of a different sort of composite can avoid the criticisms.) Thomas Senor, explicating compositional accounts offered by Leftow and Stump, explains that, "The CA [compositional account] claims that God the Son [W in my abbreviation] is one part of the composite that is God Incarnate." But then the question arises, "[I]s God the Son identical to God Incarnate?" He identifies God Incarnate as Jesus Christ and argues that if God the Son is but a proper part of Jesus Christ, then God the Son and Jesus Christ are not identical. And if God the Son and Jesus Christ are not identical, "then either Nestorianism is true and there are two persons in the incarnation, or God Incarnate—Jesus Christ—is not a person."[12] Appeal to my analogy as an action composite can avoid this conclusion.

There are many different senses of "identity." Our question, the Chalcedonian question, has to do with *personal* identity. God the Son and God Incarnate must be numerically the same person. The question of personal identity is a difficult one, and there is no consensus among philosophers. Happily, we do not need to propose an analysis of personal identity. Taking the Chalcedonian statement as our framework, we need achieve only the modest goal of showing the bare possibility of a single being existing as

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[12]Senor, "Compositional Account," 55–56.

one person having two natures. The issue is not identity understood as Leibnizian indiscernibility wherein x and y are said to be identical if, for every property F, x has F if and only if y has F. Obviously some x and some y may exhibit radically different properties and yet be the same *person*. Perhaps x is you at age ten, and y is you at age fifty. Perhaps x is you sitting, and y is you standing. Perhaps x is you throughout your existence, considered in abstraction from you reading right now, and y is you considered only as you read right now.

As I have spelled it out, WI is not a person, but a state of affairs. So W is not the same person as WI, since WI is not a person. W is the same person as W in WI, the agent who is the main constituent, and the only person, in WI. The analogous version of Senor's question regarding N and NP should be: Is N the same person as the agent who is the main constituent of NP and the only person to constitute a part of NP? Call N when considered as part of NP, N in NP. Call Nick *simpliciter*, that is Nick considered in himself whether or not he is playing the video game, NS. NS is not identical to N in NP in some Leibnizian sense. NS and N in NP can exhibit different properties. For example, NS might or might not be playing a video game, whereas N in NP must be playing a video game. NS is not necessarily a part of something of which NC is a part, whereas N in NP is. But are NS and N in NP the same person? Well, it would be peculiar to say that Nick is no longer a person or has become a different person just because he is playing a video game. So the part of NP that is N is surely a person and the same person he was before becoming part of NP. NP is constituted by at least one person, then.

Does the presence of NC in NP add a new person? No. NC is just the video game character played by Nick, so NC is not a person in his own right. This would be the case even on the fantastical hypothesis that video game characters can be persons. For the sake of the analogy imagine—if you can—that video game characters have conscious experience with some degree of reasoning capacity and free agency. And suppose that the non-playable characters are little, individual, two-dimensional persons, call them digital persons or DPs. On this story, the behavior of the DPs, which we 3-D folks thought was simply the programming of the game, is symptomatic of a personal inner life. *Ex hypothesi* NC is not one of these non-playable characters. If some actual human were to try to take over one of these little persons and make it into a first-person playable character that would mean the destruction of the DP in question. There might be *something* left of the DP, but it would not be a person any longer. The point is this: To serve as an adequate analogy for a Chalcedonian Christology, even if video game characters can be persons in their own right, NC is not a person and never was a person. NC was never an individual substance since, by hypothesis, it exists only as the character played by N. In our fantasy, video game characters have consciousness and a will and an intellect. So NC, being a real video game character, has these things. But it has them only as the character being played by N. So,

even on our fantasy hypothesis, there is only one person involved in NP. If it is metaphysically possible that among the constituent parts of NP there is only one person, albeit a person engaged in an activity involving additional elements, and N in NP is the same person as NS, we have all we need for the analogy to succeed. It is true that, by definition, a whole cannot be a proper part of itself. But N can still be a proper part of NP. N is not NP, *itself*, since N is not identical to NP. Most importantly N is a person whereas NP is an action composite state of affairs. Still, N is the same person as N in NP.

If this analysis of the situation in NP is plausible, it suggests that there may be equivocation in the term "God Incarnate." The term might mean the action composite, WI, in which case it is a state of affairs, not a person. W is a part of WI, in that case. Or it might mean the divine person, W in WI, Who is the source, the main constituent of, and only person in, the action composite. W *simpliciter* (WS) considered in Himself, in abstraction from whether or not He assumes a human nature, is not indiscernible in a Leibnizian sense, from W in WI. WS may or may not involve being incarnate, while W in WI must. WS is not necessarily part of a composite which also includes H, whereas W in WI is. But there is no reason to deny that WS is the same *person* as W in WI, and a proper part of WI. The Chalcedonian claim is that the Word Incarnate is the Word doing something. It is the divine person assuming a human soul and body. The Word has two natures, one per se, and one through the act of assuming. The human soul and body do not constitute a person in their own right, although other human individuals are constituted by a human soul and body. The Nick Playing analogy suggests the metaphysical possibility of such a situation. If the composite in question is an action composite, then Senor's conclusion—that the composite theory entails that there must be two persons in the Incarnation or none—does not follow.

Robin LePoidevin has recently raised similar criticisms against the composite theory of the Incarnation. He proposes the following argument:

(a) The pre-incarnate divine nature = the incarnate divine nature (since nothing intrinsic has happened to it).

(b) The pre-incarnate divine nature = the Second Person of the Trinity (since the three members of the Trinity exhaust its composition, and nothing else is divine, so only the Second person of the Trinity could be identical to the divine nature, given that neither the Father nor the Holy Ghost become incarnate).

(c) The Second Person of the Trinity = Christ (since Christ is the Son made man).

(d) The Second Person of the Trinity = the incarnate divine nature.

(e) Christ = the incarnate divine nature.

However, says LePoidevin, "(e) is false, as the divine nature is only part of Christ."[13]

But the problem with composition does not arise if we take the composite in question to be the action composite WI, which "contains" only a single person, its main constituent, W. We can construct a valid argument resembling LePoidevin's, which concludes to (e), where (e) is unproblematically true. In LePoidevin's argument the term "divine nature" is the term used to label the divine "part" of Christ which exists as incarnate and as pre-incarnate.[14] This term is confusing in this context in that Father, Son, and Spirit share one divine nature, but "divine nature" does not refer to that. Here—as Premise (b) says—the term "divine nature" refers to a person, the Second Person of the Trinity, the one who assumes human nature and so could be called "incarnate" or "pre-incarnate."

The "=" indicates numerical identity; the terms on either side refer to the numerically same thing, like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.[15] On my approach, the term "incarnate divine nature," that is, the Word Incarnate, could mean two different things. It might refer to W in WI, the person, or to WI, the action composite. In order for Premise (a) to be true, we must take it in the former meaning. In that case (a) states that W, before assuming H, is numerically the same thing as W in WI. In that W and W in WI are the same person, that claim, W=W in WI, would be true. If we take "incarnate divine nature," the Word incarnate, to refer to the action composite, WI, then (a) is false. W is a person and WI is a state of affairs, so W is not numerically the same thing as WI. Premise (b) is unexceptionable. It says that W = The Second Person of the Trinity. If we take "Christ" to label the action composite, WI, then (c) is false. It is not the case that W=WI. The Word assuming human nature is a state of affairs, not a person. But if we take "Christ," more plausibly, to refer to the *person* who is God assuming human nature, the Son made man, then "Christ" refers to W in WI. Premise (c) is true if the claim is that W = W in WI since the Second Person of the Trinity is W, and the Son made man is W in WI. It is the same as the true version of Premise (a) and is uncontroversial. To be true, Premise (d) must take "incarnate divine nature" to be W in WI, and so it, too, says W=W in WI. And (e), then, says that W in WI = W in WI. LePoidevin's paradox of composition disappears. God Incarnate is not a composite person, and Chalcedon never said He was. He is one person with two natures, but "with" here is entirely consistent with analyzing the Incarnation as the divine Word assuming human nature. (N in NP is a boy "with" four hands, two 3-dimensional, meat hands, and two 2-dimensional, digital hands.) God Incarnate is a person who brings about, and hence is the main constituent of, a composite state of affairs, His being incarnate.

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[13]LePoidevin, "Identity and the Composite Christ," 178.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Ibid., 167–168.

IV. The qua *Move*

A reason to employ the NP analogy, and to think of WI as an action composite, is that it helps make sense of the *qua* move in attempting to ascribe attributes to God Incarnate. If He is one person with two natures, one divine and one human, shall we say that He is, for example, both omniscient and limited in knowledge? But that seems contradictory. The traditional solution says that God Incarnate is omniscient *qua* divine and limited in knowledge *qua* human. But if God Incarnate is only one person, then it seems that it should be possible to ascribe one, and only one, of a pair of opposing properties to the unified being. Note that the properties in question are not properties ascribed to the whole of the action composite, WI. WI is a state of affairs and states of affairs are neither omniscient nor limited in knowledge. Our question is about the *person* who is the main constituent of WI, whose causal activity brings WI into being and provides the unity in WI, that is the Word who assumes human nature, W in WI.

Senor, in criticizing Leftow's defense of the composite theory, takes him to task for saying that, when it comes to how to assign attributes to God Incarnate "there is just no uniform rule by which to figure out which part's attributes will come to qualify its whole."[16] Given the nature of the composite I have in mind, the issue is not how to qualify "the whole" but how to qualify the one person who is the main constituent of the composite. But a case by case approach seems right. I would add, however, that the cases can be sorted into three kinds. (This is probably over-simplified, but may be helpful as a schema which could be fruitfully qualified and developed.) Regarding W in WI, there are properties of a kind which can be had only by W, properties of a kind which can be had only by H, and properties which are of a kind such that both W and H have them, but in differing degrees (and perhaps in very different ways, depending on your preferred theory of how to talk and think about God). A similar taxonomy can be applied to properties of N in NP if we allow the science fiction hypothesis that video game characters have wills and intellects, so start with N in NP.

There is only one person in NP, and that is N, so the question is this; what properties can be ascribed to N in NP and how? There are properties that N in NP has, only in virtue of being N. For example, N in NP can be holding the game controls only insofar as he is N. NC doesn't and couldn't hold the controls. Suppose that NC has just shot one of the opponent, non-playable characters in the game. Then N in NP has shot the character. (At least it is common to ask things like, "Did you shoot that soldier?" of the boy playing the game, and to find "Yes" an unsurprising answer.) But N, *qua* N, isn't armed and didn't do any shooting. NC is holding the gun. True, NC could not take any action, or even exist, if he were not being

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played by N. Still, insofar as N in NP does any shooting, he does it *qua* NC. Given that NC expresses or represents N in the video game world, the locution that N acts *qua* NC—as or in or through NC—seems right. These are examples of properties that belong to N in NP either as N or as NC, but which could not belong to both, even in different degrees. NC cannot hold the game controls even a little bit, and N is unarmed except *qua* NC.

Similarly with W in WI. There are properties which belong to W in WI only as W or only as H, but which could not belong to both, even in differing degrees. The Christian says that "Christ died." If Christ is God, then the claim that He is mortal is at least as bizarre as the claim that Nick is two-dimensional. W per se cannot possibly die. W in WI can be mortal only because H is part of WI, and the human body can die. So W in WI is mortal *qua* H. He can weep and feel sad *qua* H. Or we might say that W in WI is omnipresent. Yes, but H is not omnipresent. H is an organic unity of a human soul and body, and the human body is in a place. (H, as part of WI, has a great deal more spatial flexibility than you and I, but still, if H involves a human body, it is in a place.) So W in WI is omnipresent *qua* W. In the case of N in NP holding the controls and shooting, and W in WI being mortal and being omnipresent, we can understand what is meant by ascribing the property to the person who is the main constituent of the whole, and it is clear which part of the action composite exhibits the property properly ascribed to the main constituent of the whole *qua* that part.

The other sort of property is the one which is possessed by the two parts of our action composites, WI and NP, but in differing degrees. We can call these "shared" properties. So N and (on our science fiction hypothesis) NC both possess intellects and wills, as do W and H. Given the ontological distance between God and creation, there is a problem with how our terms "intellect" and "will" apply to W and H. One might adopt an analogical approach, or insist upon some underlying univocity. This difficulty need not affect my points here, so long as it is granted that God is a knower and an agent where those terms bear some positive meaning for us.

These sorts of properties pose more of a problem than those where the property can apply to only one of the pair of parts in that a more robust sort of opposition is generated. With mortality, for example, it is true that H is mortal and W *simpliciter* is not, but since W doesn't have a body at all and isn't the sort of thing that might suffer a physical death, except insofar as He assumes H, there doesn't seem to be much of a puzzle. But take the example of possessing knowledge. W has knowledge and is, in fact, omniscient. H, as a distinct intellect, has knowledge, too. But H's knowledge is presumably limited in various ways, including by the human body's part in the activity of gathering, processing, and storing information. But now we have the puzzle of WI, of which the main constituent is a single person, but which has two concrete parts where one part has unlimited knowledge and one part has limited knowledge. So is W in WI's knowledge limited or unlimited or—as seems contradictory—both?

W is the ontologically superior part of WI. W sustains the existence of H from moment to moment and is the cause of all that H is or does. It seems correct, then, to hold that the property as unlimited in W trumps the property as limited in H. So W in WI should be said to be, for example, omniscient. More specifically, W in WI is omniscient *qua* W, but W in WI is not limited in knowledge at all. As an NP analogy for omniscience consider having internet access. N's access to the internet trumps NC's intrinsic inability to access it—the internet does not exist in the game. I say "intrinsic" here to allow that NC does have internet access as part of NP. Suppose that internet access is required to discover some information which will impact the actions of NC. In order to get into the secret armory, NC needs to push the brick above the trash barrel, let's say. Nick can look it up online and NC then "knows" to push the brick. So in practice NC does have internet access.[17] The digital persons in NGW might well be amazed at NC's receiving information "from beyond." N in NP has internet access *qua* N. He has it *simpliciter*, so it would be incorrect to say that N in NP lacks internet access *qua* NC. There is not any sense in which N in NP lacks internet access. Analogously, W in WI is omniscient, omnipotent, etc. This conclusion may not help us imagine what the relationship could be like between the divine and human intellects in WI as subjects of conscious experience. The fantasy that NC might have an intellect and a will is such a thin conceit that I don't know that it can be developed helpfully and so I do not appeal to it here. However, regarding our failure to grasp WI, I do not suppose that we mere mortals should expect to be able to imagine such a thing, so I do not count this as a problem with my proposal.

The critic may hold that my conclusion about the "shared" properties presents the wrong picture of God Incarnate. On my analysis W in WI just is omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good, etc. But then, the critic may say, W in WI, the single person in question, does not fit the Chalcedonian description. He is not, "like us in all respects except for sin." But what does "like us in all respects" mean here? It might mean that He is "truly human" in that He has a human soul and body. W in WI fits the description, in that case. Some take it to mean something like "very similar to most human beings in most respects" including and especially our limitations.[18] But that seems an unlikely understanding. W in WI, though possessed of a human soul and body, is radically different from most human beings in most respects. Very few of us walk on water or raise the dead at a word. Most of us were conceived by human mothers *and fathers*. For none of the rest of us does our human body and soul constitute a part of a unity which also includes a divine person. Chalcedon, in all likelihood, intended to make the point that there is genuine humanity in God Incarnate against those who would deny it. But W in WI is really quite an unusual person and very unlike most of us.

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[17]Rogers, "Incarnation," 105–106.

[18]LePoidevin, "Identity and the Composite Christ," suggests this, 170.

But if W in WI is not really subject to all our limitations how can He save us? There are many theories of atonement, and some focus on the exemplary nature of W in WI's behavior or on W in WI's sympathetic feelings. Adherents of these theories may insist, for example, that W in WI must have been truly tempted to sin—that is, He must really have wanted to do the wicked thing, knowing that it is wicked. And that means He must have believed He could do the wicked thing. If not, then He is not free and cannot serve as a model for us or really understand our condition.[19] I do not see this. The property of being good is a property shared by W and H. My proposal is that the perfect and necessary goodness of W trumps the humanly limited goodness of H, and W in WI should be thought to be perfectly and necessarily good. The only qualification is that W in WI is perfectly and necessarily good *qua* W, but it does not follow that W in WI is simultaneously limited in goodness *qua* H. Can we make sense of the biblical claim that W in WI is tempted? Yes. W in WI can be "tempted" in that H may get hungry at a time when it would be morally inappropriate to eat—for example, when it would be obedience to the Devil. But W in WI cannot truly want to do evil, and He knows He cannot do it. The will of H wills in concert (however that works) with the will of W.

But if the human will of W in WI wills in concert with the divine will of W, and W is necessarily good, is that human will not free? Anselm of Canterbury provides a plausible answer. On Anselm's account, the core of freedom is aseity, from-oneself-ness. Your choices must be up to you in an ultimate way. Created rational persons exist with all their positive properties in absolute ontological dependence upon the sustaining causal power of God. But if you, and everything positive about you, come from God, how can you bear any ultimate responsibility for your choices?[20] Anselm's answer is that sometimes God provides you with competing, morally significant motivations such that it is up to you which motivation to pursue. Thus, for the created person, morally significant freedom requires an ability to choose between genuinely open options and this includes an ability to sin.[21] Anselm holds that the situation is different with God, who exists absolutely *a se*. He does not need the open options to secure the proper aseity. God, being perfect, does the best.[22] Freedom for the divine person who is God Incarnate need not entail an ability to sin. Christ, according to Anselm, chooses "necessarily" from His perfect divine nature, and yet is free.[23] The human soul and body, H, is part of WI,

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[19]Thomas V. Morris tries to solve the problem of Christ's being tempted by saying that He cannot sin, but He doesn't know He cannot sin; *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 137–162. This seems to import too great a division between the two minds of Christ.

[20]The qualifier "positive" is there because Anselm holds that some negative properties, such as "being a sinner," do not come from God.

[21]Katherin Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 73–78.

[22]Ibid., 183–200.

[23]*Cur deus homo* 2.10.

and belongs to W, the only person in WI. The will of H conforms to the will of W, but this does not constitute one person's will conforming to another's. The will of H is the human will of W. W's freedom is not grounded in open options or the possibility of sinning, so there is no need to say that W in WI might sin, or that H in WI might do so.

Does this mean that the workings of the wills of W and H are so alien from those of the rest of us that Christ cannot really serve as a role model for us? Not on the Anselmian account. The human will of Christ is not different in kind from the wills of other human or angelic persons. Anselm holds that the angels who held fast to the good when the others fell, and the blessed in heaven, are incapable of sin. This is because to sin one would have to be genuinely tempted, and these fortunate created agents can now see nothing to tempt them. They will only the good, but they are free, and are praiseworthy for their happy condition, in that they possess it "from themselves." It is a consequence of their past choices which, due to the open options provided by God, exhibited the required aseity.[24] The will of H is unique in that it is the human will of a divine person, not the will of a human person. But in that it is a human will which is free, yet must will only the good, it is *not* unique on the Anselmian view of things.

For W in WI to serve as a role model for us, we need to try to do as He did. If it is hard for us, since we don't have the unfair advantage of being fully God as well as fully man, well, that's life. If the critic insists that W in WI *must* be limited in the ways we are in order to succeed in the work of atonement, then I respond that there is nothing in Chalcedon to ground that claim. Anselm, for one, proposes a theory of the atonement which requires that W in WI be truly God and truly man, but which does not attribute human limitations to W in WI.

Is my picture of W in WI at odds with the Bible? As I have spelled it out, for any shared property, the divine instance trumps the human instance such that it is the divine instance that is properly attributed to the person who is the main constituent of the whole composite. W in WI is omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, etc. But then, the critic may ask, if W in WI is omnipotent (for example), wouldn't we expect more striking miracles than the occasional stroll on the lake or cure of this or that local individual that we find in the New Testament? No. We have no reason at all to expect more from W in WI than we get. W existed before the Incarnation (from our temporal perspective). So, before WI existed, W was an omnipotent, agent God at work in the universe. The Bible has it that, pre-incarnate, He produced a miracle now and again to make a point, but otherwise He let the system of secondary causation proceed in the usual way. He kept it all in being from moment to moment, but He apparently did not see the need to produce unusual events with any frequency. If this is how W operates, why suppose that He must change His mind as W in WI?[25]

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[24]*De casu diaboli* 6; Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom*, 83–84.

[25]Rogers, "Anselmian Defense."

But are there not biblical passages where W in WI seems to say that He is limited? He cannot do things and does not know things? Yes, and there are passages which seem to entail that W in WI cannot be limited. If, as it says at the beginning of John's Gospel, W in WI is indeed the one through Whom "all things came to be," and if He is truly "in the world that had its being through him," it is hard to see how W in WI can be limited. Or, at least, it is hard to see if we are committed to the Chalcedonian claims.[26] Anybody who takes the Bible seriously grants that many passages are not to be understood in their more immediate and obvious sense. If we suppose that the passages which suggest limitation are expressions of the H part of WI, we may grant that H experiences human limitations, without thereby concluding that W in WI does so. Again, I do not attempt to describe how the divine and human intellects and wills might interact. But whether or not we can *imagine* it, such interaction does not seem contradictory, and, given the subject in question, that ought to be good enough to ground the possibility of God Incarnate.

V. Further Criticisms

The critic might raise a number of further points. For one thing, I have not spelled out the requirements for personal identity. The critic may say that even though N and N in NP seem to be the same person, without a theoretical analysis of personal identity it is doubtful whether or not the point about N and N in NP can be carried over to W and W in WI. I believe, to the contrary, that a robust theory of personal identity is unnecessary since, oddly enough, the personal identity of W and W in WI is actually a simpler matter metaphysically than the identity of N and N in NP. This is due to the nature of W. If, intuitively, N and N in NP seem to be the same person, then the possibility of W and W in WI being the same person is supported without our having to delve into the vexed question of human personal identity.

The problem of personal identity for human beings arises because we change, physically and mentally, over time. There must be something about us which grounds an ascription of sameness over time. Candidates include (but are not limited to) the continuity of the physical body, the existence of the same immaterial substance (mind or soul) over time, the same ground of conscious experience over time, lasting and accessible memories, or some combination of the above. Different philosophers posit different criteria, all seem subject to difficulties, and, to date, there is no consensus. Though it seems an unlikely thesis, some analyses of personal identity might allow that N is so transformed by becoming part of NP that he really does cease to be the same person. But with W and W in WI there is no transformation.

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[26]In the last couple of centuries kenoticism has been embraced by some. That is the view that the Son radically limited Himself to become a human being. This position seems at odds with the texts from John and constitutes a rejection of Chalcedon.

The God of classical theism is immutable. Though many contemporary philosophers of religion express doubt about this divine attribute, it was generally accepted among Christian intellectuals for at least the first millennium and a half of Christianity. The opinion of those attending the Council of Chalcedon would certainly have been that God is immutable, and in a very strong sense. It is not that God's nature stays the same while His beliefs and actions change. No. God is not subject to time and He does not change in any way at all.[27] God does what He does and thinks what He thinks in one, immutable act. Since there is no change in God there is no need to locate some unchanging ground of continuity in an otherwise changing thing. So there is no problem of divine personal identity. God just is the person(s) He is.

Note that this point helps address a problem about individuation. With NP, we may wonder what to say about a case where Nick plays for an hour or so, then stops playing to do his homework, then comes back to play for another hour. Is the second instance of Nick playing a part of or continuation of the first? Are there two separate states of affairs, each of which look to be properly labeled NP? Must we start indexing instances of NP to temporal points? All good questions, but happily none of them arises regarding the Incarnation. W is eternally and immutably W in WI.

The critic may respond that the above point constitutes the classically minded theist leaping from the frying pan into the fire. If we don't need to worry about God's personal identity because He is immutable, how can He possibly *become* Incarnate? Yet again, it is Anselm who offers what I take to be the most successful answer to this question. Anselm is perhaps the first philosopher to propose, in a clear and consistent way, that God's eternity entails the isotemporal theory of time.[28] Isotemporalism holds that all of time—every moment of what we perceive as past, present, and future—is equally real. Divine eternity, on this theory, entails that the entire spatio-temporal universe is immediately "present" to God. Thus He can act and interact as an agent in temporal creation in the one act which is His nature. It is correct to say that the Word *becomes* flesh when H comes into being, but this moment of W in WI's conception, along with the Crucifixion, the dawn of time and the end of days, is all present immediately to W. N and N in NP can plausibly be thought of as one and the same person even though N may sometimes fail to be N in NP. So much more so can W be thought to be the same person as W in WI given that, from W's perspective, He is immutably W in WI.[29] It is legitimate, then, to use our intuitions regarding NP to bolster claims about personal identity and action composition without proposing a robust theory of what human personal identity must consist in.

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[27]See, for example, St. Augustine's *Confessions* 12.5.

[28]Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom*, 176–183.

[29]This raises a problem for divine simplicity, but that is matter for another day.

The critic may mount a different sort of criticism and argue that NP, as an analogy for the Incarnation, suggests the wrong sort of relationship between W and H. It might be argued that N uses NC as a sort of instrument by means of which to play, and it is wrong to think of H as an instrument used by W. Does NP, as an analogy, smack of Apollinarianism, the position that the Incarnation consists in God as immaterial spirit or mind controlling a human body in place of a human soul? Chalcedon is clear that WI involves a human soul and body. Again, I have to admit that my analogy is distant at best. A closer analogy allows the hypothesis proposed above that we imagine video game characters possessed of intellect and will. Perhaps that is enough to mute the charge that my analogy suggests Apollinarianism. In any case, I am not sure how to develop this possible criticism about NC being merely an instrument.

Senor posits (in order to later reject) the analogy of "Torso," a human being who first lacks limbs and who then can have limbs attached and still be the same person she was before. He holds that human limbs, in the Torso analogy, would be more like the human soul and body assumed by the Word than artificial limbs would be. The artificial limbs are mere "instruments" and thus cannot be genuine parts of Torso. Human limbs, on the other hand (so to speak), are of the same type as the rest of Torso's body and can be "fully integrated" into Torso.[30] Senor seems to be saying that we should prefer an analysis of the Incarnation which allows H to become part of W, to be of the same type as W and fully integrated into W. But we do not want that at all! Chalcedon is clear that the two natures "undergo no confusion . . . ; at no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union." The critic might note that, in that quote, the ellipsis after "confusion" replaces "no change, no division, no separation." But saying that the two natures are not divided or separated means that they are together, which is *not* the same as being integrated if we take "integrated" to mean something like being blended or fused into a whole, which is what Senor's analogy suggests. One of the main targets of Chalcedon was Eutyches, who had held that there are two natures before the union but one afterwards. But the Council emphatically denied that the two become one nature. NC cannot possibly be "integrated" into N, but I do not see that that contradicts the proposal that NP is a unified action composite mainly constituted by N, and I do not see that NC's status is so "instrumental" as to make it inapt as a (distant!) analogy for H.

Perhaps what Senor is suggesting is that it is a mistake to allow that H is something like an instrument analogous to the marionette (M) in the action composite JM. There the marionette was something which Jim could pick up or put down. Since M is what it is with or without being part of JM, it has a nature which can be divided and separated from the nature of J in JM. But that is an advantage of NP as an analogy for WI. NC does

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[30]Senor, "Compositional Account," 58–59.

not exist except as part of NP, so it cannot be divided or separated from N. Similarly, H exists only as part of WI. Could it be a problem that in NP almost all of the causal action comes from the side of N and so NC is passive in comparison, suggesting that H is passive and hence a mere object? But the fact is that all the causal power in WI does come from W. It does not follow that H is a "mere object" in some problematic way, does it?

Is the suggestion that, if NC is something like an instrument, then, analogously, H is not a real human being? I do not see how that criticism is to be developed. NC is a real character in the game. If video game characters have intellects and wills, then so does NC. If the non-playable characters are actual digital persons with reason and conscious perceptions, then they see NC as just another one of them—except when he produces a miracle. When that happens, they may realize that NC is a very unusual character and may get some thin inkling of N, the transcendent part of NP. Similarly, though H is part of WI, this need not undermine the claim that H is a real human soul and body with a human intellect and will. Of course H per se is not a person. H exists only as part of WI, so H is the human soul and body of a person, it's just that the person is W, the only person there is in WI.

The Council of Chalcedon held that Scripture and tradition required the very difficult doctrine that God "became man," a single person with a divine and a human nature. The video game analogy provides one way of thinking about the Chalcedonian doctrine which supports the modest claim that it is not metaphysically impossible. Traditionally, Christian philosophers have held that God can do whatever is not impossible for a perfect and unlimited being to do. If becoming Incarnate is how God chooses to save us, then, bizarre as it seems, He can do it.[31]

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