

THE COMPOSITIONAL ACCOUNT OF THE INCARNATION

Thomas D. Senior

In a pair of recent articles, Brian Leftow and Eleonore Stump offer independent, although similar, accounts of the metaphysics of the Incarnation. Both believe that their Aquinas-inspired theories can offer solutions to the kind of Leibniz's Law problems that can seem to threaten the logical possibility of this traditional Christian doctrine. In this paper, I'll have a look at their compositional account of the nature of God incarnate. In the end, I believe their position can be seen to have unacceptable philosophical and theological implications, and that is it inadequate to solve the Leibniz's law problems that motivate it in the first place.

Section I: Introduction

In a pair of recent articles, Brian Leftow and Eleonore Stump offer independent, although strikingly similar, accounts of the metaphysics of the incarnation.¹ Both believe that their Aquinas-inspired theories can offer solutions to the kind of Leibniz's Law problems that call into question the logical possibility of this traditional Christian doctrine. The Leftow and Stump account of the nature of God incarnate (which I dub "the compositional account of the incarnation") will be the focus of this paper. In the end, I believe their position can be seen to have unacceptable philosophical and theological implications. Furthermore, it is inadequate to solve the Leibniz's law problems that motivate it in the first place.

Section II: Troubles for the Incarnation

The doctrine of the incarnation states that Jesus Christ was fully God and fully human. But this can seem to be an impossible claim. For, plausibly, nothing created could be God. Yet anything that is human must surely be created. Therefore, a God-human would be both uncreated and created. But it is impossible that a thing have a property and its logical complement. Therefore, it would seem, the doctrine of the incarnation is necessarily false.²

A traditional way of defending the doctrine against this and similar objections is to claim that God Incarnate has some properties "qua his divine nature" and some "qua his human nature." By making use of reduplicative sentences (i.e., sentences of the form "S qua N is P"), one attempts to insulate the properties so that there is in fact no logical inconsistency. The



idea is that even if there is a single subject of predication (as the tradition insists there is) the distinct natures can be used to separate the property ascriptions enough so that the logical difficulties are avoided.

However, this way of solving the inconsistency problem is apparently inadequate. For, it can be argued, even if it is only qua N that S is P and it is qua N* that S is not-P, as long as S indeed has both natures and “P” is univocal in both attributions, S will nevertheless be both P and not-P. In the words of Thomas V. Morris, the qua move serves only to “muddy the waters.”³

Enter Leftow and Stump. Inspired by Thomas Aquinas, they independently argue that there is a way of understanding the metaphysics of the incarnation that blocks the inference from “S qua N is P” to “S is P.” It is to this that we will now turn our attention. Because the accounts they offer are so similar, I will generally talk as though their positions are the same. When points of difference do become important, I will make that clear.

Section III: A Compositional Christ

Traditional Christian theology proclaims that in becoming incarnate, God the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, *took on* or *assumed* a human nature. According to what I’ll call the “compositional account” (CA), God the Son became a human being by adding on a human body and a human mind,⁴ and by doing it in such a way that God the Son, the human body, and the human mind of Christ together compose the Incarnate God. ‘Compose’ here is to be understood quite literally; the Incarnate God is a whole whose proper parts are the human body and human mind of Christ, and God the Son.

Yet this claim—that in addition to taking on a body, God the Son took on a human mind—brings with it a rather serious philosophical difficulty. For in the standard case (and, as seems likely, in every other case), a human body and mind combination composes a human person. So one might think that the human body and mind of Christ will compose a human person too. On the face of it, that’s no problem; after all, the tradition holds that Jesus Christ was a human person—although not *only* a human person. The problem, though, is that if the human body and mind of Jesus Christ compose a person *on their own*, then it looks as though we will have fallen into the heresy of Nestorianism, *viz.*, that the incarnation was the joining of two distinct persons, one divine and one human. For before the particular body and mind of Jesus Christ existed, the person of God the Son existed. So if the human body and mind of God Incarnate compose a person on their own, then there are two persons in the incarnation—God the Son and the human Jesus Christ.

Leftow and Stump recognize this problem. In fact, Leftow spends considerable effort trying to show that the CA theorist has a good response. Leftow claims that the defender of CA will have to make a two-part reply. First, she should say that God the Son assumes the human body and mind before the pair has a chance to compose a distinct human person. That is, the assumption occurs at conception. So even if the particular body and mind that the Son assumes *would have* composed a distinct human person had they existed on their own, it doesn’t follow that they do when they are taken on by God the Son at the moment they come into existence.

The second part of the CAer's reply gets rather complicated. The bottom line is that she must claim that it is coherent to suppose that the combination of the Son and the human body and mind compose only a single person, even though the human body and mind would have composed a person had come into existence on their own. To make this plausible, Leftow discusses Peter Geach's famous example of Tibbles, the one-thousand-haired, mat-sitting cat. Tibbles is composed by a certain mass of feline tissue. Now, of course, Tibbles could lose a hair without her thereby ceasing to exist; so consider the proper part that Tibbles now has that consists of the entire mass of feline tissue minus one particular hair that we will name Hair1. Call this part of Tibbles "(Tibbles–Hair1)." Now if (Tibbles–Hair1) were to exist on its own (that is, the matter that now composes Tibbles but without the matter that constitutes Hair1), then it would compose a cat. (That we are committed to this can be seen by recognizing that removing Hair1 from Tibbles would still leave us with a cat.) But then why shouldn't (Tibbles–Hair1) compose a cat even if it has one more hair stuck to it? It would seem that if (Tibbles–Hair1) would compose a cat on its own, then it will still compose a cat if it has one extra hair. So now it looks as though the mass of feline tissue sitting on the mat contains two cats, viz., Tibbles and (Tibbles–Hair1). But of course, if it contains two cats, then it contains thousands—one for every combination of hairs present on Tibbles. This is surely an unwelcome conclusion. A sensible metaphysics will maintain that there is a single cat on the mat.

Leftow suggests that one way to defend the single cat claim is to proffer the thesis that no member of a natural kind can have a member of the same natural kind as a proper part. If this is right, then (Tibbles–Hair1) isn't a cat since it is a proper part of Tibbles. The same holds for all the other would-be cats that nearly spatially overlap Tibbles. Now if this move works for Tibbles, Leftow reasons, it can work in the case of the Incarnation. For, Leftow avers, persons are natural kinds. That means, then, that no person can have a person as a proper part. Leftow writes:

More generally, given a set of parts composing at time *t* a member of a natural kind (e.g., cat), no subset of that set composes at *t* a member of the same natural kind. Well, then: persons are a natural kind. So if at *t* S [the human soul], B [the human body] and the Son compose a person, no subset of {S, B, and the Son} does so.⁵

So if there is a divine person who exists prior to assuming the particular human body and mind of Christ, then the human body and mind can't compose a person too. For if it could, then the human person would be a part of the person who is the compositional whole, and thus Leftow's principle would be violated.⁶

Let me be more specific about what I mean by calling Leftow's and Stump's position a "compositional view" of the incarnation. Here's Leftow's formulation:

Perhaps the most formal, abstract thing one can say about the incarnation is this (following such as Aquinas): for the Son to become incarnate is at least for there to come to be a whole consisting of

certain parts. Let “the Son” name the Trinity’s second person and “Jesus Christ” name the whole consisting of the Son + B [the particular human body assumed by the Son] + S [the particular human soul/mind assumed by the Son]. Then for the incarnation to take place is for Jesus Christ to come to be, by the joining of the Son, S and B.⁷

Stump is equally explicit about the compositional nature of her view:

Because Christ is one and just one person, and a person is a substance of a particular sort, there is just [one] substance in Christ. That substance is composite. It includes a human soul and body and the divine nature. So Christ is one composite person.⁸

So both Leftow and Stump view the incarnation as the coming into existence of a composite consisting of God the Son and the human body and mind of Jesus Christ.

Section IV: Troubles with the Compositional View

Traditional Christian theology maintains that the Godhead is Trinitarian: three persons but one substance. Add to this the claim that one member of the Trinity is God the Son, and you get the conclusion that God the Son is a person. And his being a person is independent of his becoming incarnate. Indeed, since traditional Christian theology also teaches that creation is the free action of the Godhead, it follows that there are worlds at which God the Son is not incarnate but is yet a person.

The CA claims that God the Son is one part of the composite that is God Incarnate. For ease of reference, let’s refer to the person who is the Second Person of the Trinity and who would have existed whether or not there were ever an incarnation, “God the Son” (GS). Let’s refer to the composite that is composed by God the Son and the human body and mind of Christ “God Incarnate,” or “Jesus Christ” (JC).

We can now ask this question: is God the Son identical to God Incarnate? In fact, we can ask this question in a more traditional way. Since JC just is God Incarnate, we can pose our Christological question by asking if JC is identical to GS. The tradition clearly teaches “yes”: Jesus Christ and God the Son are identical; “they” are the same person. And herein is a significant problem for the CA: it must, in the end, deny this. Recall that JC, is a composite consisting of GS, and the human body and mind assumed in the incarnation. So if GS is but a proper part of the individual who is Jesus Christ, then the friend of the CA is committed to saying that GS and JC are not identical. Their nonidentity brings with it one or the other of two unwelcome consequences: either there are two persons in the incarnation or the composite Christ is not a person.

Stump does consider the potential problem that the CA is committed to two persons, but what motivates her worry is the same thing that troubled Leftow: if a human body and mind are sufficient to compose a human “substance” (in Thomistic terms) and a human substance is a person, then it would appear that assuming a complete human nature means that GS

takes on a distinct human person. Receiving her cue from Aquinas, Stump responds by claiming that this is not so in the Incarnation “in virtue of being subsumed into the larger whole,” or because the human body and mind are “part of a larger composite.”⁹

Yet the problem as we are now considering it is not motivated by the worry that the human body and mind of JC will compose a distinct person on their own. Rather the problem here is that since JC is a composite that has GS as a proper part, JC and GS can’t be identical.¹⁰

Surprisingly, Leftow accepts this consequence. He thinks that GS is not identical with JC because the former is simple and the latter a complex whole composed of the Son, and the human body plus human soul.¹¹

This is, however, highly problematic. For, as previously noted, if JC and GS 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. To make matters worse, the fact that the CA is committed to JC’s not being a person falls out of what Leftow says earlier when he claims that no natural kind can have a member of that same natural kind as a proper part (recall the Tibbles discussion). But Leftow thinks that persons are natural kinds.¹² So then GS can’t be a proper part of JC if JC is also a person. Thus, if GS is a person (and surely that is nonnegotiable) then either JC is not a person or GS isn’t part of JC.

But if JC is not a person, then there is no person who is God Incarnate. The doctrine of the incarnation is supposed to bring us comfort in the belief that God knows our condition because God the Son was one of us. The CA straightforwardly denies this. What it substitutes for a personal God Incarnate is an impersonal conglomerate.

Section V: Compositional Alternatives

The problem we are considering for the CA has been generated by the claim that JC is a compositional whole consisting of GS together with a human mind and body. Since a whole can never have itself as a proper part, GS can’t be identical to JC. This together with the assumption that GS is a person, entails that either God Incarnate is a person distinct from GS (in which case Nestorianism follows) or else God Incarnate is an impersonal conglomerate. But might there not be some way the friend of CA can tweak her theory so that she can hold the traditional Christological identity of GS and JC?

Section V.I First Alternative: Compositional God the Son

Yes, it seems that there is. Perhaps the defender of the CA can claim that I’ve misrepresented the situation. For although it is a necessary truth that a whole cannot have itself as a proper part, one and the same entity can be composed of {p1, p2, and p3} at t1 and yet be composed of {p1, p2, p3, and p4} at t2. Now let’s name the first set S1 and the second set S2. S2 has S1 as a proper part, but, of course, S1 is not identical to S2. But if we can allow that an object can be composed of one extra part at t2 than it was composed of at t1, then we’ll be able to see that one and the same entity can have the set of all the parts that composed it at t1 as proper part at t2. Here’s an example: a tree grows a new branch; it now has all the parts that previously composed it together with a new part. The collection of older

parts then goes from composing the whole of the tree to composing only a proper part of the tree.

So maybe the CA can be salvaged by claiming this: at t_1 , GS is a simple, immaterial divine spirit. But at t_2 , GS assumes a human nature, taking on a particular human body and mind. GS now comes to have parts GS didn't have before. That is, before the incarnation, GS just is the immaterial spirit. But once he becomes incarnate he takes on two more parts. So whereas the immaterial divine spirit was once all that composed GS, after the incarnation, GS came to be composed by GS + human body + human mind. Just as, for example, a tree can grow new branches so the Son can take on material parts.

Let's think harder about cases in which an entity takes on or adds parts while maintaining its identity. To make our discussion at least a little more relevant to questions of the incarnation, let's jettison talk of trees and their branches and replace them with humans and their limbs. In particular, let's consider the case of Torso. Torso is a human who, due to an unfortunate interaction with a combine, has no arms or legs. Torso suffers no mental defects and will pass any reasonable test for personhood. We have no problem imagining that Torso could get artificial or donor limbs that would function as well as typical human limbs function. Furthermore, it is at least arguable that they then become genuine parts of her (more on this below). So here is a case of a person who takes on parts she formerly didn't have and, at the end of the story, she is a composite that is a bit larger and compositionally more complex than she was formerly.

Notice that in both the case of GS and the case of Torso, it is possible that the individuals will come to lose the newer parts and return to their prior state. But this engenders no metaphysical impropriety. The newer parts were, *ex hypothesi*, nonessential parts of the original individual. Parts can be added and lost without the identity of their owner suffering.

Just how good is the analogy of Torso to the CA of God Incarnate? In order for the case to do its work, it must be clear that Torso now has her new limbs *as parts*. But as the case was described, that's not obvious at all. Suppose that the limbs are artificial—human-made, non-biological prosthetic devices. It is plausible that no matter how natural they look, and even how natural they feel to Torso, they are no more than well-attached instruments. After all, if we super-glued a pole with a spring-driven clamp on the far end to your hand, you would not have added a part. You'd have merely attached a grabbing instrument to one of your parts (i.e., your hand). So as long as the prosthetic device is hooked onto the body (even if it is wired in), it will not be clear that the device actually becomes a part. Indeed, many would say that it is clear that it isn't.

Yet we can add a further specification of the case that can get around this difficulty. For consider the possibility of donor limbs. Suppose that limbs could be donated like some organs can. So Torso awaits the untimely death of someone who dies young and with healthy limbs intact. These limbs are removed and sown onto Torso in the same way they'd be sown onto her if her own limbs had been recently severed and reattached. Within weeks, Torso is walking, writing, and behaving as she did before her disfiguring accident. Her limbs not only function like her old limbs for the purposes of walking, writing, and other types of standard human behavior, but they

also “behave” in all other ways like natural limbs: the tissue is being kept alive and healthy by the circulation of blood, and the parts of the limbs are being regulated by the body just as Torso’s original arms and legs were.

There is little doubt that her new limbs are parts of Torso. There is no good reason to think that Torso has merely had attached instruments that fall short of being genuine parts. The limbs are precisely of the same type and attached in the same way as her original limbs, which were, of course, paradigmatic parts. Now if the fates are sufficiently cruel, Torso might survive losing these four parts again. And even before her nickname became appropriate, Torso existed. She then became de-limbed, then re-limbed, and de-limbed a second time. But it is Torso herself who survives these changes.

Now can we say something parallel regarding GS? Of course there is no talk here of GS’s initially having parts removed. But we can leave off that first step: GS exists as a simple, immaterial person. It will come in handy for us to refer to the simple, immaterial, divine *spirit* that originally composes GS as “GSS.” So in the fullness of time, for us humans and our salvation, GS takes on a human nature—that is adopts a concrete pair of human parts—a human soul and a body. Now composition is not identity; so we are not saying that GS becomes identical with this incarnate state (whatever that might mean). But GS now comes to be composed by it—that is by GSS, and the human body and mind of JC. And in the future, possibly, he will shed these human parts, and revert to being composed of simply GSS.

The advantage of this view over Leftow’s and Stump’s is clear: Nestorianism is avoided and Jesus Christ is identical to God the Son. In taking on his human parts, GS becomes a human being (although, of course, not *merely* a human being)—the human being JC. So there is a single person in the incarnation and that person is identical with GS.

What are the problems with this defense of CA? Theologically, it runs into trouble with even a mild version of the doctrine of simplicity. On this view, GS is not identical with GSS since what composes GS when GS is incarnate is not simply GSS but is GSS together with the human body and mind. If GS comes to be partly composed of a human body and mind, then there just is no good metaphysical sense in which GS is simple. Of course, the divine nature remains simple, but the Second Person of the Trinity does not. Furthermore, GS will be partly material. These would seem to be most unwelcome theological consequences, at least for someone interested in defending the traditional view of the nature of God and of the Trinity.

Philosophically, the problem is a bit harder to see, but even more decisive. It is part and parcel of this view that in virtue of taking on the human body and mind, GS comes to be composed partly of them. But in virtue of what does GS’s taking on human nature mean that the human body and soul *literally* become part of him? This gets us deep in to the metaphysics of the part/whole relation. So a full answer is undoubtedly beyond our grasp for the present purposes. But we might make some progress with another analogy. First, though, let’s note an important disanalogy between the case of GS/JC and that of Torso.

I’ve been assuming that Torso is a human being who is composed by the matter in her body. That is, if we think that Torso is identical with a human animal, then the part of her that is her improper part just prior

to the attachment surgery is similar in kind to the parts that are being sown to her. Both consist of conglomerations of cells the make up and structure of which are consistent with human DNA. When the arms and legs get attached, their microparts circulate with the circulating mass of microparts that had composed Torso prior to her surgery. Arguably, they become genuine parts (rather than mere instruments) because, after a time, they are fully integrated into matter and activity of Torso's other parts. It is because nothing like this happens with the mechanical grabber that it never succeeds in being more than a mere instrument of Torso's.

But with GS and the "addition" of the human body and mind, things are rather different. Although GS might come to bear a intimate and unique relationship to these other entities, there is no possibility that the human body and mind will be incorporated into the life of GS in anything like the natural, organic (and I mean that metaphorically, at least primarily) way Torso's new limbs are joined to her. Because GSS has no proper parts, there is no chance that the human parts will be integrated to it.

So then we must ask, in virtue of what do the human body and mind come to be *parts* of GS, as opposed to mere instruments or some other kind of entities related externally and instrumentally to GS? If we think of an analogy with a non-divine person, I think we'll see that there is no way for this compositional relationship to be established. Suppose, for example, that there was a certain person, call him "Socrates," who existed as a simple, immaterial spirit. After a time, the powers that be decide that Socrates should become attached to a body and spend some time in the shadowy world of matter. So these powers imbed Socrates in a body. For a time, Socrates is able to use his body as a means to express himself, as a means for gathering information (via the senses), and as a means of locomotion. Eventually Socrates wears out his welcome in the material realm and is made to drink a potion that will release him from his body. My question is this: is it plausible to suppose that while he was embedded in the material realm, Socrates' body was literally a part of Socrates, just as the new branches are literally a part of the tree or Torso's limbs are literally a part of her?

I maintain that it is not. Socrates' body is to Socrates very much as a mechanical grabber is to me.¹³ Just as I am able to use the grabber to accomplish some tasks I could not have done with out it, so Socrates is able to do some things that would be impossible for him to do disembodied. But neither the grabber nor Socrates' body can be incorporated into the very essence or nature of that which is using them. Since Socrates existed prior to his inhabiting a body, his essence or nature did too. Now I'm not claiming that only that which is essential to one is properly said to be a part of one (Torso's case shows that's wrong). I'm maintaining instead that parthood requires being integrated into the essence of that to which a thing is attached as a part. My claim is that Toro's limbs pass this test, but Socrates body doesn't.

One might be concerned that accepting my account of part addition and its implications for Socrates has serious consequences for anthropological dualism. Does the fact (if it is one) that Socrates can't come to have a physical part entail that dualism is false? No, it doesn't. First, there are dualists (like Plato) who hold exactly the view I've described. That is, some dualists

are happy to say that the physical “part” of a human is an ersatz part; it is an instrument of the soul, or maybe even a prison, in which the soul is housed. Naturally, many Christians reject this view as, well, too Platonic. For these people there are other options that do not contradict what I have to say about the Socrates case. Socrates (as described in my case) was pre-existent. So he can only have a physical part if it is possible that he takes it on subsequent to his coming into existence. However, if the dualist claims that the soul and body were created at the same time, then it isn’t clear at all that they can’t both be parts of Socrates. For in this case, the body needn’t become integrated into the immaterial part because it has simply always been a part of who and what Socrates is. On this picture, Socrates is composed of a body and soul from the beginning of his existence. Socrates body is one of his two primary proper parts. Finally, if the dualist thinks that the mind is emergent and although numerically distinct, is nevertheless ontologically dependent on a functioning brain, then there is no problem with the claim that human person is a conjunction of the physical and mental. For in this case, the mind is surely integrated into the physical part of the person since it is the product of the causal activity of the brain. So my argument for the claim that the pre-existent, simple, immaterial Socrates cannot come to have a body as a literal part has no serious consequences for many varieties of anthropological dualism.

Although this isn’t the place to get into a full-scale discussion of the nature of parthood, I do want to briefly consider another objection to what I’ve been arguing. I said that Socrates does not have his body as a part of him because parts must be integrated into the essence of that of which they are parts, and that there is simply no way for a body to be so integrated into a simple, immaterial soul. But one might think that this is a bad condition for parthood generally. After all, it is unproblematic that a door is part of a car. But in what sense is the door *integrated* into the essence of the car? It is attached via a pair of hinges. Can that count as proper integration? The answer is that it can. There is no reason to expect that the details of the ways in which parts come together to compose wholes will be the same for every type of object. It is plausible to think that the specific conditions for integration of parts into wholes for living organisms will be rather different from the conditions of composition for nonliving, artifactual material objects. I suspect that being attached by bolts and hinges might well be sufficient for being integrated to the essence of a car, given that a car just is a collection of parts so adhered. In short, what “integration into the essence” comes to will depend greatly on the type of entity in question.

Section V.II Second Alternative: Imbedded God the Son

There is, however, a possible position that doesn’t require that the human mind and body literally become part of GS. I’ll conclude this part of the paper by considering this option.

Perhaps GS’s taking on a human nature—that is a human mind and body—isn’t really much like taking on a part. So even though there was a time at which GS had no merely-instrumental-parts,¹⁴ he came to have some at the incarnation. So before the incarnation GS = GSS. And then, with identity being what it is, once the incarnation occurred we still have GS = GSS. The human nature is adopted by GS but that does not mean that

there is some new thing in addition to the simple, divine spirit to which GS is identical. Still, for us and our condition, he took on a human body and soul to use instrumentally. Like the attached long-armed-metal grabber, the human body and soul, though assumed by GS, are not part of him. Nor are they part of a whole that composes him. Rather, we might say that GS becomes in a way *imbedded* in the human mind and body he assumes.

So what are the implications of saying that these things are assumed by GS, although not as literal parts but only as instruments? Well, it can be reasonably maintained that even ersatz-parts that are assumed but not genuinely integrated into the essence of a thing can have drastic effects on what the thing does and even, in a sense, what it is capable of. For example, suppose a politician decides that she wants to really know what the life of disabled Americans is like. She then makes the following commitment: she'll spend a month in a wheelchair followed by a month blind (but not in a wheelchair). If she is a person of genuine conviction, her commitments will limit not only what she in fact does, but also what she *would do* in various counterfactual circumstances. So in taking on these conditions, she not only restricts, and to an extent, diminishes her actions, but she also restricts the range of action that she will and would perform. Of course, she remains *capable* of standing even when in her wheelchair and of seeing when wearing her blindfold. So she gives up no genuine abilities, but she restricts her range of actual and counterfactual action and knowledge (one gives up some knowledge one would have had if one agrees to go blindfolded for a month).

So we might try to see the incarnation in a parallel fashion. Perhaps, to count as genuinely human, you have to have a genuinely human mind and body through which you act. Perhaps acting through this human mind and body entails that you lack the information of the divine mind, and lack the impeccable spirit of the divine being. This doesn't mean you sin, of course, but only that you act from a spirit that is not impeccable. And while these limitations have counterfactual ramifications, they don't amount to a literal abandoning of the powers one had in the first place.

This model of the incarnation sees GS as taking on, or assuming, human nature with its incumbent limitations, but yet it doesn't entail that JC is an impersonal conglomerate, or that GS is a composite person during the incarnation. Thus it has advantages over its more literally compositional cousins. Furthermore, none of the objections to the other various ways of altering the CA apply to it. The view, though, does have its difficulties. One might wonder, for instance, whether, on this view, God Incarnate was "fully human." For the body and human mind of Jesus Christ do not only fail to compose a human being on their own, they are not even parts of the person who is God Incarnate. Be this as it may, the present position is not one to which Leftow and Stump can hitch their wagons. Recall that an important part of the motivation for the CA is that it be able to account for the whole's having certain properties because those properties are had by its parts. In order for this gambit to work, the parts need to be *real* and not ersatz parts. So while it follows on the present view that GS has all the properties of GSS (since this position sees GS and GSS as identical), there is no similar pull for thinking that the properties had by the human mind and body of God Incarnate are properties of God the Son. To see

the full impact of this point, however, we must consider the issues of the next section.

Section VI: Why the Compositional View Doesn't Help Much

Let's put all these issues aside and assume that the Leftow/Stump version of the CA is unproblematic. At the beginning of this paper, we saw the work that Leftow and Stump have for the CA to do. They are led into their discussions of the metaphysics of the incarnation as a means of answering philosophical objections to this central Christian doctrine. They claim that the CA gives one the philosophical resources for answering charges of inconsistency. In this section, I will argue that that Leftow and Stump have greatly overestimated the degree to which the CA is successful in this enterprise.

Before getting into the nitty gritty of this, I should point out that while I was able to treat Leftow and Stump as offering the same general version of the CA, there are important differences in how they use their common perspective to solve problems of purported logical inconsistency. Therefore, I'll have to spend more time explicating the differences in their perspectives in this section.

As I said earlier, Leftow and Stump believe that the CA can be used to avoid logical difficulties by explaining how reduplicative sentences (i.e., sentences with the form "S qua N is F") can be used to show the consistency of incarnational claims. For example, it would seem that because he is God, JC must be omnipotent; yet because he is human he must be a finite being of limited power and hence be not omnipotent. But how can he be both omnipotent and not omnipotent? Well, Leftow and Stump aver, the omnipotence is had qua JC's divine nature and the power limitations are had qua JC's human nature. Because the properties are had qua different natures, there is no contradiction in saying that JC is both omnipotent and not omnipotent.

That's the basic idea. But how are we to understand what it is to have a property "qua" something? It is here that the CA is supposed to earn its keep. Stump writes;

This distinction [between a property a whole has in its own right and a property it has only in virtue of having a constituent part that has the property] gives us a helpful way to analyze qua locutions of the form x qua A is N . In such a locution, the property of being N is predicated of x , but it is predicated of x just in virtue of the fact that x has a constituent C which has the property of being N in its own right.¹⁵

This line of thought can also be seen in Leftow's paper. Leftow is particularly interested in using the reduplicative sentences to show how JC can be both human and yet timeless. Writes Leftow:

If we allow talk of a timeless Son and temporal beings forming a whole, part/whole considerations can disarm well-known objections to moves in Christology. Wholes often have attributes because their parts do. Apples are red because their skins are—that is, because their parts include red skins. . . . One can use the term '*qua*' to indicate just

which parts give an item certain of its attributes. Apples are red *qua* skinned, that is, because they include skins.

Christologists often say things like

(C) Christ died *qua* human but not *qua* divine.

I think the best reading of claims like (C) is mereological: we ought to read them as we just read my claims about apples. If (C) is true, I suggest, Christ did die: for a person including a human body and soul dies if his body dies and his soul is parted from it. What (C) asserts is that Christ died because his human part died, not because his divine part did.¹⁶

So Leftow and Stump agree on the basic reading of reduplicative sentences. “S *qua* N is P” is to be understood as being equivalent to “S has a constituent part N and N is P.”

Doesn’t this mean that *qua* locutions just ascribe properties to parts and not to wholes? If that’s right, then it’s no wonder that there is no conflict between “S *qua* N is P” and “S *qua* N* is not P;” since the subjects of attribution turn out to be distinct. The real subjects are the parts not the wholes. However, both Leftow and Stump deny this, and claim that the whole can also be ascribed the properties of the parts. Yet Leftow and Stump differ in their accounts of how this is so. We’ll look first at what Stump has to say before turning our attention to Leftow.

Section VI.I: Stump on Property Borrowing

Stump claims that the idea that the CA ultimately ascribes properties to the parts, rather than to the whole is mistaken.

[T]his line of argument [i.e., that the reduplicative sentences ascribe properties only to parts and not to wholes] can’t be right. A thing [Stump has been discussing a molecule that has both coiled and Y-shaped parts] which has a coiled part really is itself coiled in some respect or to some degree. Similarly, in virtue of having a part that is Y-shaped, the whole itself is really not coiled in that respect or to that degree. If a student seeing a diagram of the molecule for the first time were to describe it to someone unfamiliar with its shape, she might well say, “Well, it’s a sort of complicated coiled, Y-shaped molecule.” So the incompatible properties of *being coiled* and *not being coiled* are attributes of the whole molecule not just of different parts of the molecule. But because these are borrowed properties, since the molecule does not have these properties in its own right, there is no incoherence in the claims that the molecule is both coiled and uncoiled.¹⁷

Stump continues:

As long as *qua* locutions are understood in this way, it is clear that both *qua* locutions—“x as A is N” and “x as B is not N”—can be true

without any violation of the laws of logic. The two qua claims taken together do not have the result that we are making inconsistent claims or that we are giving a logically incoherent account of *x*. Although contradictory attributes are being predicated of the same subject, they are not predicated in the same respect. [The molecule] C/EPB is coiled in virtue of having a constituent which is could in the alpha helix manner, and it is not coiled in virtue of having a constituent which is Y-shaped.¹⁸

It looks as though Stump is claiming that any property had by a part is had by its whole “in some respect or to some degree.” Surely if a molecule that is by no means genuinely coiled is counted as “coiled, in some respect” in virtue of having a part that is coiled, then it would seem that all properties had by parts are had, in some respect, by wholes. But either the degree to which the whole has these properties can be so small as to be insignificant or the view is just false. I have parts that are microscopic. But I’m not microscopic. I have parts that are transparent, boneless, and ameba-shaped, but I’m none of those things in any sense at all. Adopting the view that all properties had by parts are had “in some respect” by the whole is therefore a road best not taken if there are other options. And, as we shall see, there are.

Stump claims to take the idea that wholes “borrow” properties from component parts from the work of Lynne Rudder Baker.¹⁹ Yet on Baker’s account of borrowing, the whole neither borrows every property from every part nor borrows any property only in “some respect” or “to some degree.” Properties that are borrowed are “really” had by the whole. Here’s a quotation from Baker that Stump herself cites:

[I]f *x* borrows *H* from *y*, then *x* really has *H*—piggyback, so to speak . . . if I cut my hand, then *I* really bleed. . . . I borrow the property of bleeding from my body, but I really bleed.²⁰

There is no indication in anything Baker says that the properties borrowed are had only in a qualified way.²¹

The reason that I make a point of noting Stump’s misuse of Baker’s notion of borrowing is that Baker’s original notion just can’t do the work that Stump needs it to do. For on Baker’s account of borrowing, if *x* were to borrow *H* from *y*, and at the same time *x* were to borrow $\sim H$ from *z*, then *x* would really be *H* and $\sim H$. So if JC borrows omnipotence from his divine part and non-omnipotence from his human part, then JC would really be omnipotent and non-omnipotent, and, like the poor, the logical problems would always be with us. In short, borrowing in Baker’s sense can be of no use to Stump unless it provides at least a measure of property insulation. If the whole only has the property of the part “to a degree” then the Stump’s view has at least some hope of being useful for solving incarnational troubles.

There are other problems with Stump’s account. We can see one of them by noting that her analysis of the qua move accomplishes what she wants it to accomplish only if the entailment from “qua *A* is *N*” to “*N*” is blocked; that is, only if the properties of the part are at least partially insulated

from the whole, so that the properties are borrowed but not had by the whole *simpliciter*. But for a great many borrowed properties, it appears that the entailment holds. As we've seen, that seems to be part and parcel of Baker's idea of borrowing. I get a gash on my leg and blood is pouring out. My leg is bleeding. *I'm* bleeding. I am bleeding because I have a part that is bleeding. As explained above, Baker's account of "borrowing" has it that *I* have this property in an unqualified way. That is, it isn't that since I am bleeding only because my leg is bleeding (and my leg is a part of me), I am only bleeding "in a respect." No, I am just plain bleeding.

Notice this too: I have other parts that have the property of not bleeding. Stump would have us say then, that *qua* my leg, I'm bleeding and *qua* my ear, say, I'm not. So I'm bleeding in some respect and not bleeding in others. But this is just wrong. Given the property that gets picked out by the English predicate "is bleeding" when applied to human persons, *I* am bleeding if I have a part that is bleeding externally. So even though I'll have lots of parts that aren't bleeding, I still satisfy the conditions necessary and sufficient for having the property of bleeding if my leg is bleeding. Similarly, I have parts that weigh more than twenty pounds. I borrow the property of weighing more than twenty pounds from them. But I have other parts that weigh less than an ounce. Is the sober truth of the matter the same in both respects—in each case I borrow the property from the parts that have them, and that both are true in their respective respects? Surely not. Weighing more than twenty pounds trumps weighing less than an ounce where *I'm* concerned.

In order for her account to solve the logical difficulties in the incarnation, Stump needs the respective kind-essential properties of divinity and humanity to be had primarily by parts of the composite whole, and for the whole to borrow the properties enough so that there is a sense in which the composite has the properties but not to such a degree that there is problem with consistency. That is, borrowing (or an approximation thereof) is needed so that there remains a single object of predication in the incarnation and yet property insulation is required to avoid incompatible attributions. The trouble is that if the properties are borrowed in the way that Baker has in mind, then the composite simply has those properties, and no ground against the logical problems is gained. So Stump has the composite borrowing the properties "in a respect," hoping to split the difference between honest-to-goodness borrowing and the insulation of the properties of the parts from the properties of the whole. But this implies that all borrowed properties are had only "in a respect" and that is not the case.

Section VI.II: Leftow on Property Borrowing

Leftow considers explicitly the question of why "*S qua N is P*" doesn't entail that "*S is P*," and hence that the *qua* move does nothing to help with the apparent logical problems faced by the doctrine of the Incarnation.

The answer, on a mereological reading of Christology's '*qua*', is that there is no entailment here because sometimes the attributes of one part become the attributes of the whole, and sometimes the attributes of another part do: the apple as a whole is nutritious because of some of its parts, though the rest are not nutritious, and the apple

as a whole is red due to other of its parts, though the rest is not red. So the attributes of the apple's non-red and non-nutritious parts do not become attributes of the whole, and there is just no uniform rule by which to figure out which part's attributes will come to qualify its whole. Thus, christologists and students of apples must work things out case by case. The Son is omnipotent. S + B [the soul and body of JC] is not. Here, probably, the whole counts as omnipotent. But divine attributes do not always become attributes of the whole: again, the whole Jesus Christ is created [because JC is a composite that includes the created parts of the human body and soul].²²

So Leftow also maintains that wholes sometimes borrow properties from their parts. But he differs with Stump in two related ways. First, he thinks that not all properties of parts become properties of their respective wholes; and second, he thinks that, at least in most cases, when wholes do borrow, they simply have the properties they borrow—and don't have them only in a respect.²³ The apple is red because the skin is red; it isn't merely "red to a degree." Leftow's view is stronger for differing with Stump in these regards. Yet while Leftow's position is more tenable than Stump's, its general tenability is no guarantee that it will be successful in solving the logical difficulties it is supposed to solve. Indeed, I think we can see that it will not.

Leftow says "there is just no uniform rule by which to figure out which part's attributes will come to qualify its whole." He gives two Christological instances where the whole does borrow properties from the divine part: JC is created (this is borrowed from JC's humanity) and omnipotent (borrowed from his divinity). As for the other potentially problematic property pairs, they will need to be worked out "case by case."

To say that these property pairs will have to be worked out one at a time is to say that the qua move does not, in fact, give us any general help in resolving the logical difficulties of the incarnation. For any pair of logically complementary properties that we are tempted to attribute to JC in virtue of his dual nature, the defender of the qua move will insist that one member of the pair is had qua divinity and the other qua humanity. That much needn't be worked out case by case. But whether JC borrows the particular divine property or the particular human property will not be resolved by use of reduplicative sentences. Yet this is precisely where we need help and where the qua move was supposed to be useful.

Now Leftow does say something suggestive that might be seen as a defense from this charge. Before ruling that the composite Christ is created, Leftow considers an advantage of the CA over views that see the incarnation as involving the taking on of abstract natures (i.e., sets of properties) rather than the literal taking on of parts. Leftow writes:

The property of being created does seem to be the sort of metaphysical property individuals have *simpliciter*, rather than only in virtue of having other properties. This is a reasonable cavil with a reading of (H') [i.e., "Christ as God is uncreated but as a man is a created being"] as involving abstract natures, i.e., taking 'as God' to indicate not a *part* but a *property* in virtue of which Christ has a property. But it

fails absolutely against a mereological reading. . . . On such a reading, (H') tells us that Christ has one part which is created and one which is uncreated. Each part has this property *simpliciter*, not in virtue of other properties. And again, no contradiction emerges here. We do not have to say that Christ is both created and uncreated. The worst we might have to settle for is a claim that Christ has a created part and an uncreated part, and neither 'created' nor 'uncreated' applies *simpliciter* to a whole consisting of such parts. (Consider a sphere whose surface is half-white, half-black: it has a white part and a black part, and neither 'white' nor 'black' applies to it *as a whole*, for the way we use colour-words requires [something like] that a thing be called [say] black only if the *majority* of its surface is black.)²⁴

So Leftow might claim that the qua move, understood in the mereological way, helps for all cases of apparent logical incompatibility in the incarnation. For these problems will be resolved in one of two ways: either by our coming to see that although the composite JC has property P, JC's being P is borrowed from one part's being P, while there is another part that is not P (this is what happens in the case of omnipotence, say). Or the problem will be resolved by our coming to see that although JC has a part that is P and another part that is not P, JC is neither P *simpliciter* nor not P *simpliciter*. In either case, it is the mereological understanding of reduplicative sentences that allows us to see the solution.

Although initially tempting, I think the above resolution should be resisted. For the qua move will only provide a general (if two-pronged) solution to these Leibniz's Law problems if we can abide talk of JC's failing to have *simpliciter* either a property of divinity or its logical complement. But such talk runs afoul of a pair of principles we should accept. Let me explain.

As every student of deductive reasoning knows, two fundamental principles of logic are The Law of Noncontradiction (LN) and The Law of the Excluded Middle (LEM): no proposition is true and false, and every proposition is either true or false. And as every teacher of basic logic knows, both these principles can seem, on first blush, to admit of counterexamples. When a fine mist fills the air on a dreary day, it can seem fitting to say "it is raining and it is not raining." If this is indeed true, then the LN is apparently false. Or the other hand, if on such a day you are asked, "Is it raining or not?" you might be inclined to think "neither" is the accurate answer. And if that is right, then it seems the LEM can't be true.

These apparent counterexamples are, however, merely apparent. For they trade on an ambiguity in "is raining." On the one hand, "it is raining" can mean that there is some form of non-frozen precipitation in the air; on the other hand, it can mean that there are discrete drops falling from the sky. So the reason "It is raining and it is not raining" can be used to say something true is that it can be used to say "There is non-frozen precipitation in the air and there are no discrete drops of rain falling from the sky." Similarly, "It is raining" might seem to lack a truth value because it is ambiguous, and until it is disambiguated, it simply fails to assert anything.

The LN and the LEM can plausibly be thought to have the following corollaries regarding properties. The Law of Noncontradiction for Properties (LNP): No object can have a property and its logical complement; and the

Law of the Excluded Middle for Properties (LEMP): For every object O and for every property P, either O exemplifies P or O does not exemplify P.

It is the LNP that the doctrine of the incarnation is in danger of violating when it ascribes to JC the properties of divinity and the properties of humanity. We've seen that Leftow would resolve some of these potential problems by claiming that the whole borrows some, but not all, properties from its parts. So JC can borrow the property of being created from JC's human part and omnipotence from JC's divine part. JC is then created and omnipotent, and (in keeping with the LNP) JC fails to have the logical complements of those properties. So far, so good.

But Leftow also wants to say that in certain cases the properties will not be had *simpliciter* by the whole. Of course, he's not saying that they should be understood to be lacked *simpliciter* by the whole either. The point of the black and white sphere example is that the property of being black, say, doesn't apply to it *simpliciter* although it does apply to some degree. At least in this kind of case, the sphere's having a part that is black suffices for the sphere's being *sort of* black. Or as Leftow suggests at one point with respect to JC, we might just have to say that JC has a created part and an uncreated part and that "neither 'created' nor 'uncreated' applies *simpliciter* to a whole consisting of such parts." But this claim confuses predicates and properties. While it might be true that neither the English word 'created' nor the English word 'uncreated' applies in an unqualified way to JC, that is irrelevant to the primary concern. For the properties of God Incarnate are what is of interest. To see this, recall the half white, half black ball. Again, the way English color words are used, we can't unequivocally say that the ball is 'white' or that it is 'black.' But that doesn't mean the ball has some *property* that is indeterminate. Once we clarify what property we mean to be picking out when we call the ball 'black,' then either the ball will have or lack that property *simpliciter*. For instance, one might think that to have the property of "being black" an object must be black over 90 percent or more of its visible area. If this is the right account of the property of "being black," then every object will have or will lack that property *simpliciter*. In short, the vagueness that Leftow is noting is in our language and not in the world of objects.

Let's consider, then, how this applies to the incarnation. Because JC is divine, there is reason to ascribe omniscience to JC; but because JC is human, there is reason to think JC's knowledge must be limited, and that JC is hence not omniscient. Might we content ourselves (and our logical scruples) by settling for this as the rock-bottom truth: JC has a part that is omniscient and JC has a part that is limited in knowledge, and that's effectively the end of the story? That the best we can do is say that JC is neither omniscient *simpliciter* nor limited in knowledge *simpliciter*, although he is *sort of* both? No, we'd better not content ourselves with this unless we are prepared to give up the LEMP. If we manage to pick out a well-defined property with our term 'omniscience,' and if JC is a unified entity (that is, if there is a single subject of predication), then JC will either satisfy the conditions for being omniscient or he won't. If JC does then JC is omniscient *simpliciter* and if JC does not then JC lacks the property of omniscience.

One might think that if there are two minds in God incarnate, one omniscient and one not, then JC would not be omniscient (or not) *simpliciter*, but only omniscient-in-a-respect and not-omniscient-in-a-respect. But this would be a mistake. To see why, consider a composite physical object that has a part that weighs in excess of ten pounds and another part that weighs less than ten pounds. Even if it is correct to say that the object is in excess of ten pounds in a respect and less than ten pounds in a respect (in virtue of the composite's having parts that are such), it is also true to say that the object is in excess of ten pounds *simpliciter*. In the same way, if JC has a mind that is omniscient and another mind that isn't, the composite JC adopts the "stronger" of the two properties since if JC has a mind that is omniscient there is nothing that JC doesn't know.

I conclude, then, that the qua move, even understood in light of the CA, can't be used to show how to get around the logical difficulties faced by the doctrine of the incarnation. For wholes sometimes do, and sometimes do not, borrow properties from parts. When they do, the wholes *really* have those properties and so a whole can't borrow a property and its logical complement from a pair of its parts. So no ground is gained for the coherence of the incarnation by appealing to the properties of JC's parts. On the other hand, when a whole doesn't genuinely borrow a property from a part, we can't truly ascribe the property to the whole in a less than *simpliciter* way. While failing to pay proper attention to the distinction between predicates and properties might make this seem initially possible, once the distinction is noted and the LEMP recognized, we see that even this last stand for the CA-inspired qua move breaks down.

Section VII: Conclusion

In this paper I've argued that the compositional view of the incarnation is fraught with both philosophical and theological problems. Furthermore, even if this weren't so, the compositional view does nothing to help the traditional conception of the incarnation get around the logical difficulties thought to beset it.²⁵

The University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

NOTES

1. Brian Leftow, "A Timeless God Incarnate" and Eleonore Stump, "Aquinas' Metaphysics of the Incarnation." Both papers appear in *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ, and Gerald O'Collins, SJ (Oxford University Press, 2002). Stump's paper is taken from material from chapters 1 and 14 of her book *Aquinas* (Routledge Press, 2003). References to Stump are to her article in the Davis, et al., volume. Although Stump's book contains more material about both the details of Aquinas's metaphysics as it relates to the Incarnation and how to understand the claim that a single person could have a duality of intellect and of will as required by the traditional doctrine, I believe that the

paper in the Davis volume contains everything directly relevant to the considerations of this paper.

2. Objections of this type are sometimes called “Leibniz’s Law” problems since the doctrine seems to imply that Jesus Christ would not have every property that the Second Person of the Trinity has, and vice versa. But since Jesus Christ is supposed to be identical to the Second Person, this would involve a violation of Leibniz’s Law (i.e., that if $a = b$, then a and b have all properties in common).

3. Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 49.

4. To avoid the heresy of Apollinarianism, it is not sufficient that the Son take on a human body. To become *fully human*, God the Son must take on a human mind or soul too. The idea is that if the Incarnate God is just God clothed in a human body, the Son fails to be fully human. The traditional way the point is made is that in becoming incarnate God the Son acquired a human body and the rational soul of a human. However, there is no need for us to read this in the dualistic way it typically intended. Apollinarianism is avoided so long as God Incarnate has all the parts essential for being fully human; if humans have only material parts, and our thinking is simply the result of a properly functioning brain, then Apollinarianism is avoided if Christ has a complete, properly functioning human body.

5. Leftow, p. 282.

6. As will be apparent presently, the principle that a person can’t be a part of a whole that is itself a person is actually irrelevant to questions about the Incarnation if the CA view is right. For the compositional whole will, it turns out, will not be a person. More on this soon.

7. Leftow, p. 287.

8. Stump, p. 206.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 208, 209.

10. Here one might be tempted to employ relative identity as a way of attempting to salvage the traditional identity statement. Perhaps God the Son and God Incarnate are the same God but different entity or something of that sort. However to their credit, neither Aquinas nor Stump nor Leftow make this move here.

11. Leftow, p. 294.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 282.

13. My use of this example should not be taken to indicate that I think there is no possible way of construing mind-body dualism according to which human is genuinely a mind-body composite. The example of “Socrates” here is that of a simple immaterial person who exists prior to his embodiment, and who then takes on a human body.

14. My use of temporal language here is not essential to the point I’m making.

15. Stump, p. 212

16. Leftow, p. 288.

17. Stump, p. 213.

18. *Ibid.*

19. The paper of Lynne Rudder Baker’s that is of primary relevance here is “Unity Without Identity: A New Look at Material Constitution,” in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 23 (1999), pp. 144–65.

20. Baker, pp. 159–60. This very selection is quoted by Stump on page 205 of her article.

21. Baker does say that when a property is borrowed, then there is only one instance of the property—there is only one instance of bleeding even though

“both” my hand and I bleed. But this is not to qualify the sense in which the whole instances the property.

22. Leftow, pp. 290–91.

23. As we’ll see shortly, Leftow does argue that in some important cases, wholes borrow the properties of their parts only *to a degree*.

24. Leftow, pp. 289–90. The bracketed words are part of the original quotation.

25. Thanks to Brian Leftow, Eleonore Stump, Matt McGrath, Matthew Mullins, an anonymous referee for *Faith and Philosophy*, and my graduate seminar in philosophical theology for helpful suggestions.