

Incarnation and the Multiverse
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“...it has to be said that the Divine Person, over and beyond the human nature which He has assumed, can assume another distinct human nature.” –Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* III, q.3, a.7.

Traditional Christians affirm the doctrine of the Incarnation—the doctrine that God the Son, second person of the divine trinity, became fully human as the man Jesus of Nazareth while remaining fully divine. The doctrine developed over the course of the first few centuries of the Christian faith. During that time, weaker (and less metaphysically puzzling) alternatives were ruled out by the councils of the Church, alternatives such as that God only *appeared* in the form of a human; that Jesus was only an especially God-conscious human; or that the divinity of God and the humanity of Jesus were somehow strongly correlated for a time, but not really bound together in a single individual.

Why have Christians opted for the strongest—and hence least comprehensible—conception of the Incarnation? The Incarnation is thought to serve certain divine purposes—purposes that would not have been served had the divine-human nexus been less intimate than the orthodox position specifies. At least two such purposes seem relevant.

First, most Christians hold that the Incarnation is *essential to the rescue operation that God brings about in Jesus*. Christians understand the details of the rescue operation—called “the Atonement”—in various ways. On one conception, the death of Jesus expresses a righteous judgment of and restitution for human sin. In offering that restitution on our behalf, Jesus makes it possible for us to be forgiven and be restored to fellowship with God. Jesus could appropriately serve as our representative in this way only if he became one of us, our elder and blameless “brother”. On a second conception,

Jesus' life, death, and especially his resurrection (can) liberate us, individually and communally, from the captivity of sin and its destructive consequences, including death itself. On still a third conception, Jesus' living a self-denying, love-filled life and his voluntarily suffering an unjust death provide the only model for a fully-formed human life and unleash a power of love that can transform us. Finally, the Eastern Orthodox teach that the union of the human with the divine in Jesus and his subsequent exaltation pave the way for us to gradually partake of the divine nature. On all these models—and we note, that, importantly, they are not mutually exclusive—we must cooperate with God in some manner for these benefits to flow to us; the chief work of the Atonement is wrought by Jesus, but we must respond to and appropriate it. Further, on all these models, if the union between Jesus' divine nature and human nature is less than complete, a prerequisite for God's purposes for the atonement of humanity would fail to be satisfied. (For some, the necessity here is merely conditional. According to them [Aquinas, for example], while it is 'fitting' that God chose the incarnational path of atonement, he was free to do so in other ways.)¹

The Incarnation is also thought to serve a second divine purpose: in identifying with human beings in such an intimate way, God thereby *affirms human nature to be of profound intrinsic value*. What is so special about human nature such that God would wish to so identify with it? The creation narrative in the biblical book of *Genesis* states that humans are divine *ikons*, image-bearers of God. This statement is seen by many theologians as, first, a recognition of certain intrinsic features of human beings, such as

¹ Of course, it may be that certain theories of the Atonement do not adequately motivate the Incarnation, despite what their proponents contend. If so, that would be a reason to reject the sufficiency of such theories, since an adequacy constraint on them is that they explain why God became incarnate.

our capacity for rationality, for self-awareness, for freedom, and for self-emptying love; and, secondly, as a two-fold gift befitting those same features: the offer of friendship with God and the promise of an eventual, fuller realization of our potential. Indeed, theologians have suggested that the even stronger “divine image” language used of Jesus Christ in the New Testament signifies that in the risen Jesus humanity is most fully realized.² Our future hope is that we shall be similarly exalted through our identification with him. We shall return to this important theological consideration below.

Now, let us suppose that the basic doctrine of the Incarnation in its ecumenical fundamentals is coherent and let both of the claims just indicated concerning the divine purposes for Incarnation (rescue operation, however understood, and affirmation and future transformation of human nature) be treated as corollaries of it. We suggest that modern scientific understanding of the scope of created reality and plausible theological reflection in a Leibnizian vein both pose a *prima facie* problem for the plausibility of one aspect of the doctrine: its claim of uniqueness.

It turns out that humans inhabit a vanishingly small fraction of known spatio-temporal reality. Might there be creatures elsewhere in our immense cosmos that satisfy the intrinsic conditions for bearing the divine image? This matter is much debated in astrobiology. For all we know, it could be that the probability of the appearance of divine-image bearing (henceforth, DIB) creatures is so small that it may take a cosmos 100 billion light years across and 14 billion years old to generate a single DIB species.³

² For an influential development of this suggestion, see Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, volume III, part 2.

³ The question hangs in part on the necessary conditions for life, something that is still not fully understood. Even on our own planet, we are finding life forms (“extremophiles”) in conditions that had been thought to preclude life. On the other hand,

But, likewise for all we know, the universe might be richly populated with creatures capable of self-awareness, rationality, freedom, love and so forth, to the same or greater degrees than ourselves. And that's just when we contemplate the *confirmed* scope of spatio-temporal reality. Recent, scientifically-motivated multiverse hypotheses explode the scale of *contemplated* physical reality to a high unimaginable degree. For those who suppose that such cosmological theorizing has a significant measure of empirical support—this, too, is hotly debated—the epistemic likelihood that many other DIB creature kinds exist will be significant, too.

There are also *philosophical-cum-theological* reasons to suppose that reality is a great deal larger than the domain of human observation and influence. Leibniz is surely correct that a being who is necessarily infinitely wise and good will always act for a reason, and indeed (where such is *available*) for the best reason, all things considered. God's actions can bear no trace of value-flouting whimsy or arbitrariness. Among God's actions is the creation of our universe, whose composition is rife with seemingly arbitrary values—the total number of stars, the precise ratio of fundamental particles, the exact speed of light, etc. It must have been *good* for God to create our universe, else he would not have done so. But it seems that it would have been good also for God to create a universe of a more or less different fundamental character.

There is not space to fully explore this matter, so we will limit ourselves to some

the seemingly unrelated matter of an active plate tectonic system—which is also responsible for earthquakes and volcanoes—appears to be essential for recycling elements of the atmosphere and regulating the temperature of any life-sustaining planet. It is for want of such an ocean-based system that the planet Venus cannot sustain life, even though it lies within the “habitable zone” around our sun. (See James F. Kastings, “Planetary atmosphere evolution: Do other Habitable Planets Exist and Can We Detect Them?” *Astrophysics and Space Science* 241 (1996), 3–24.)

brief remarks. Famously, Leibniz held that our *world*—all of actuality: the cosmos, God, and whatever else God might have brought into existence—is the best of all possible worlds. He thought that the infinitely wise God would be able to ‘solve for’ the optimal balance of good-making features of possible created realities analogously to the way that one may solve for a minimal or maximal value of a curve or size of a region in calculus. In particular, God would solve for the maximin value of a world with endless variety and plenitude that is governed by extremely simple fundamental principles, this global feature being to Leibniz’s mind the chief determinant of world perfection. Such variety can be achieved in part by infinite compositional descent with distinct forms at each level (i.e., substances that have ontologically unique parts that have ontologically unique parts that have...).

We note that this general approach of seeking optimal balance of goods is consistent with its turning out that a very large (possibly infinite) multiverse figure into the desired solution. And, indeed, there is to our minds a plausible argument from incommensurable goods for such a conclusion (although it is one that Leibniz could not accept). While our universe plausibly is very good in some respects—e.g., in orderliness, in beauty, in its capacity to give rise to morally free creatures—at least some of these goods may come at the expense of other possible goods, e.g., kinds of structured complexity inconsistent with the kind exhibited in our universe, corresponding kinds of beauty, and creaturely flourishing unsullied by the possibility of moral evil. That is, these other possible goods and some actual goods could not co-exist *within a single universe governed by uniform natural laws*; consequently, cosmos-building requires trading some such features off of others. If this is so, the question then becomes whether *inconsistent*

sets of good-making features are themselves *incommensurable*—whether such sets are incapable of being ranked with respect to overall metaphysical goodness.

Leibniz’s negative answer to this question seems to have been heavily determined by his supposing (at least much of the time) that the very abstract and general good of fecundity-from-simplicity is the chief determinant of divine choice.⁴ But we doubt that. It seems more likely that more “local” goods need to be weighed alongside such “global” goods in determining a universe’s value. Such local goods will pertain to some kinds of individuals (including all sentient beings) and their flourishing, the species of which they are instances, and less-than-fully global localities, such as ecosystems. Corresponding to each of these categories, there will be structural goods of various kinds (e.g., involving one or more of the categories of metaphysical, aesthetic, moral, socio-political and epistemic). If the possibilities for natural laws and basic kinds of goods vary sufficiently widely, it seems likely that there will be good-making features that cannot sensibly be ranked with respect to each other. And if this is so, it seems further likely that at least some universes of great goodness will be incommensurable, in virtue of exemplifying inconsistent sets of such localized good-making features. The result is that there is a plurality of intrinsically good universe-types; in place of a great chain of (possible) being, there is a great branching tree.⁵

So where does that leave us? We should, we think, go with Leibniz at least to the extent of supposing that God would be *disinclined* to pick one value over another arbitrarily; He would do so only if forced to choose. But, we note, he *needn’t* choose

⁴ For discussion of Leibniz on this point, see Catherine Wilson’s “Leibnizian Optimism,” *Journal of Philosophy* 80 (11) 1983, 765-783.

⁵ This position is developed in Timothy O’Connor, *Theism and Ultimate Explanation*, Blackwell: 2008, Ch.5.

between the options, as he might create the best of every class of possible universes whose members are commensurate in value. This collection of top-valued members among value-ordered branches of possible universes would *collectively* constitute the best possible world. Quite possibly, many of these universes possess the value of containing DIB creatures. (Leibniz would here object that such a multiverse would ruin the organic value of reality as a whole. We doubt that it is sensible to apply the notion of organic value to collections of almost completely disconnected totalities, but even if it is, it seems plausible in the envisioned scenario to suppose that this drawback is amply outweighed by the goods secured in realizing all of the best universes of their value-kind. And the selection of this particular array would hardly be purely arbitrary, and so might admit of a sort of organic unity applicable to collections of universes, if such there be.)

But many depart more radically from Leibniz by rejecting his assumption that there *is* a best possible world. Suppose that he was so mistaken. Perhaps, for each (or some) of the valued-ordered branches of commensurable universe kinds, there is no *top* value (corresponding to one or more of the kinds). We think that this scenario, too, points in the direction of a multiverse, indeed of an infinitely-membered one. For it is hard to credit the thought that a perfectly wise being of limitless power, contemplating each of the infinitely ascending branches of the creative possibilities, should just arbitrarily pick one from each, fully aware that whichever one he picks, no matter how far up the scale it resides, there are others of enormously greater value than it. Again, if He had no choice but to make such an arbitrary selection, we would suppose—unlike Leibniz, who was irrevocably committed to the Principle of Sufficient Reason—that he might well do so.⁶

⁶ And also unlike William Rowe, who thinks this scenario points to an a priori argument

But He did have another, less arbitrary choice. For he could choose an appropriate threshold of goodness and create every one of the infinitely many universes above it (or every other one, or every millionth one, or...) In this case, almost certainly, infinitely many of these universes possess the value of containing DIB creatures.⁷ It is hard to say what would be an appropriate, non-arbitrary threshold of goodness. The most obvious candidate is any universe with on-balance positive value. But this fails to take account of more “local” considerations, such as passing over universes that involve intense suffering of persons without even the prospect of their acquiring redemptive significance. Once one begins to consider plausible such constraints, epistemic modesty seems the order of the day: we, severely cognitively limited creatures that we are, just cannot say where the line would be drawn by a morally and cognitively perfect being.⁸

For these reasons, Christians have significant (though by no means definitive) scientific and theological reasons to leave open the possibility that there are other DIB creatures in existence. But if so, it would seem that the divine purposes behind the human Incarnation would also apply to these other beings: supposing any of them were in need of rescuing of the sort that Christians believe we are in need of, taking on their natures would presumably be a prerequisite for such saving work among them. And even if no

for atheism. See his *Can God Be Free?* New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. For a reply, see Timothy O’Connor’s review of the book in *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* 2005.04.08.

⁷ This line of argument is developed in O’Connor (2008), Ch.5.

⁸ Which is not to say that we cannot say anything at all. We are inclined to assume, for example, that a perfect Creator would not be motivated to create qualitatively duplicate worlds or worlds which are only trivial variants on other worlds, with no significant difference of *type*. Here, the artisanal image of the Creator looms large in our thinking. Is it only for want of time and other resources that a human artisan, having created an exquisitely beautiful statue, is not strongly motivated to reproduce it? We judge not. Creative fecundity is best measured in types, not tokens. (And note that once duplication is on the table, there is no satisfiable limit, since there is no highest transfinite cardinal.)

rescuing were needed, the second divine purpose—identification with the lives and experiences of DIB creatures—would apply anyway.

In response to this suggestion, a Christian might say that God’s human Incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth serves both these purposes for *all* DIB creatures. After all, human persons vary considerably, yet God’s incarnation as the particular 1st century Palestinian man Jesus of Nazareth is thought to serve God’s restorative and identifying purposes for all of us. Why not for all DIB creatures, human and nonhuman alike?

There are a couple of reasons to find this response unsatisfying. First of all, it suggests that we humans won an Incarnational lottery—that we alone, for no apparent reason—were chosen as the recipients of God’s incarnational act. Here again, Leibnizian worries about arbitrariness loom. Why would God choose us rather some other DIB species among which to be incarnated?^{9, 10}

⁹ Leibniz tacitly acknowledges something like this worry in Part I, sect. 18 of *The Theodicy*, when he criticizes an unnamed proponent of a rationalist, ‘astronomical theology’: “It does not appear that there is *one* principal place in the known universe deserving preference to the rest to be the seat of the eldest of created beings; and the sun of our system is certainly not it.” We note, however, that on this particular point, Christian theology teaches that the particulars of Christ’s Incarnation—a lowly birth in a cultural backwater—were, despite natural expectations, particularly *fitting* circumstances for the one “who came, not to be served, but to serve,” and to be an example thereby to all of us.

¹⁰ Not all philosophers of religion are terribly troubled by this sort of divine arbitrariness. Robert Adams contends that there is no moral *obligation* to create the best *and* that a choice by God of less than the best can be adequately accounted for in terms of divine grace, a disposition to love independent of the value or merit of that which is loved. (“Must God Create the Best?,” *Philosophical Review* 81 (1972): 317-32.) And Michael Rea has recently suggested that the oft-troubling fact of divine silence vis-à-vis his human creatures may reflect in part God’s personality, His preferred mode of interaction, rather than anything about the extent of His concern or love for us. (“Divine Hiddenness, Divine Silence,” in *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology, 6th edition*, edited by Louis Pojman and Michael Rea. Boston: Wadsworth/Cengage, 2011, 273.) We may have these thinkers wrong, but they seem to be suggesting that there may be idiosyncracies to God’s personality, characteristics that have no integral connection to God’s other omni-

A second problem for the suggestion that God's Incarnation as the human Jesus serves God's purposes for all DIB creatures has to do with an implied epistemic ignorance, of Jesus' life and work, by these creatures. While it may be that God's purposes for other DIB creatures can be served without their knowing about it, Christian devotional practice reflects the view that an eventual *awareness* of God's redemptive work is a great good for us, a source of comfort ("we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses...let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence" Hebrews 4:15-16) and joy ("How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!...what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him..." I John 3:1-2). Further, inasmuch as God's redemptive work includes the formation of a community of creatures in covenant relationship with God, and inasmuch as that community was inaugurated by and remains formed around the Incarnate Son (as is implied by the Biblical language of the Church as a "body" whose "head" is Christ), it would appear that redemption cannot be complete for a DIB creature who lacked awareness of the Incarnation and connectedness to the community it inaugurated. For it is plausible that one has not been fully folded into a community unless she is aware of that community's existence and *raison d'être*.

Well, maybe you buy the foregoing reasoning, and maybe you don't. But even if there happen not to be any DIB creatures save human beings, or there are, but the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus serves God's purposes for all of them, there is an

attributes. For our part, we can't attribute idiosyncrasy and the contingency that seems to flow from it to God's character, given the necessity of his existence and his bearing the traditional omni-attributes.

underlying metaphysical issue worth exploring: whether or not it is within the scope of an omnipotent being's power to take on more than one DIB nature. Might God have been multiply incarnated? If so, how might this work? With Aquinas (in this essay's epigraph), we hold that a viable metaphysics of the Incarnation has the consequence that multiple Incarnations are indeed *possible*. Here we can but sketch a way of modeling this possibility and consider a few objections.

I How to Be An Incarnate Deity

As with the doctrine of Atonement, so with the doctrine of Incarnation: all traditional Christians affirm it, but there is much disagreement concerning how to lay a conceptual foundation for beginning to understand it. The core thesis is that the second person of the Trinity, God the Son, took on a full human "nature", so that He became a single person having two natures, human and divine. *Prima facie*, this is incoherent, as at least certain of the essential properties of divinity and humanity seem incompatible. A number of theories have been offered to show that first appearance is deceiving in this case. The theological and philosophical issues they raise and difficulties they face are complex, and we shall not try to survey them here.¹¹ Instead, we will indicate our preferred theory, and that only briefly. While this theory certainly does not dispel all mystery surrounding the Incarnational doctrine, it does provide a model that doesn't have incoherence on its face. We will then deploy it to consider the possibility of many-natured incarnation.

¹¹ The reader seeking a philosophically-sensitive discussion of these theories may consult Richard Cross, "Incarnation," in Thomas Flint and Michael Rea, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, 452-75. For a fuller look at specific options, see the nice collection of essays in Anna Marmodoro and Jonathan Hill, eds., *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

The view that we propose is the *compositional theory*—or rather, a particular version within the family of compositional theories. The core idea here is that, in taking on a full human nature, mind and body, the single divine person becomes a *composite* thing or substance. He is the self-same person, retaining all the omni-attributes of divinity, but now has and expresses two natures, each of which are distinct components of his being.¹²

Where we go from the core idea in developing the compositional theory depends in part on how we think of human persons. We shall follow neither the many Christians who thought or think of humans as immaterial substances nor the medieval Aristotelians such as Aquinas who thought of them as matter-form compounds. Instead, we hold that we (merely) human persons are wholly materially composed individuals who have a kind of unity not had by garden-variety material composites. This unity is conferred by our having strongly emergent mental capacities and properties, which are metaphysically basic—*not* physically realized—features that make a (non-redundant) causal difference to the way the world unfolds. (In the familiar older lingo, our view is a substance monism about the human person conjoined with a strong form of non-epiphenomenal property

¹² As you'd expect, there is a thorny issue here connecting this picture of the Incarnation to the doctrine of the Trinity, according to which God the Son is a person who is *of one substance with* the Father and the Holy Spirit. It might seem that the divine-human *composite substance* that, on our account, is the incarnate Jesus Christ could not be of one substance with the other, wholly immaterial persons of the Trinity. While we will not try to finesse that puzzle here, we note that we are inclined to agree with Leibniz that avoiding contradiction requires us to reject the common scholastic view of the communicability of properties between the two natures. But see pp.206-7 of Eleonore Stump, "Aquinas' Metaphysics of the Incarnation," in *The Incarnation*, Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ, and Gerald O'Collins, SJ (eds.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, 197-218.

dualism.)¹³

On our preferred version of compositionism, when God the Son became incarnate, he simultaneously created and absorbed *into himself* a human embryo which, as it matured, manifested increasingly rich mental capacities and properties.¹⁴ That developing embryo-fetus-newborn-youth-adult was (and eternally is) not a distinct person from God the Son, co-trinitarian-participant in the creation of the world. It was (and is) an instance of human nature, a living, fully intact human body, but one that is not, *in itself*, a person at all; it is a part, the human part, of the one person, God the Son, latterly known as Jesus Christ in virtue of the incarnational event.

Now, an important task for any would-be compositional account of the Incarnation is to specify the relation that holds between the components of this divine-human being, such that they are substantially unified and together constitute a single person. In agreement with most orthodox theologians, we doubt that this task can be fully accomplished: we human beings lack the conceptual resources to fully penetrate the mystery of the Incarnation. But some things can be said that go a certain distance.

One adequacy constraint on such an account is that it makes clear why the human component of the divine-human individual does not constitute a purely human person in

¹³ It's interesting to observe that, in his late correspondence with Des Bosses, Leibniz saw a problem for his mere aggregation view of the human body in application to the Incarnation. If Christ is himself to be a true unity and not a mere aggregation, there needs to be a 'substantial bond' (*vinculum substantiale*) *within* his human nature, something more than his official picture of a colony of monads and their modifications allows. We thank Maria Rosa Antognazza for calling our attention to this discussion, which is available in Brandon Look and Donald Rutherford, eds., *The Leibniz-Des Bosses Correspondence*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007.

¹⁴ In Thomas Flint's terminology, our is a 'model T' rather than 'model A' version of compositionism. See his "Should concretists part with mereological models of the incarnation?" in Marmodoro and Hill (2011), 67-87.

its own right. To that end, we suggest that persons are individuated by their being both *a center of subjectivity* and *the wellspring of the acts* they perform. In other words, sameness of person entails sameness of subject and sameness of agent. Typically, an instance of human nature will include, in itself, a proprietary center of subjectivity and agency; that is, a properly formed and functioning human body is sufficient for the emergence of an autonomous, experiencing *subject* and *agent* at the center of a dynamic phenomenal/intentional manifold. But were the human nature of Jesus to include a proprietary human center of subjectivity and/or agency, we would have on our hands a *complete (solely human) person*, or so it seems to us.

Here's what we propose. When God the Son took on a human body as a part, the emergence base for that human body's mental states were expanded. It then included not only the types of causal powers that would ordinarily be sufficient to generate an experiencing subject and agent at the center of a dynamic phenomenal/intentional manifold. It also contained divine causal powers that *masked* the causal powers responsible for the emergence of a proprietary human subject. Conscious mental state nevertheless emerged, but absent a proprietary *human* subject, they emerged as mental states *of the larger individual*, the divine-human composite.^{15, 16}

Yet the Christological creed of Chalcedon also teaches that Jesus had distinct and "unmingled" human and divine "intellects" and "wills". To square our proposal with this

¹⁵ We thank Dean Zimmerman for helpful discussion on this point.

¹⁶ It is hard to see why the purely human nature of the Incarnate Son should not be separable from the composite individual—Incarnation does not seem to entail the temporal eternality of Incarnation, even if it is so in fact. What then would be the ontological status of Jesus's particular human nature, were the Son of God to sever ties with it while continuing to sustain it in existence? It seems that this would entail the appearance of a new, purely human individual with merely quasi-memories.

creedal declaration, we suggest that the one person, the Son, somehow operates *through* his human intellect—experiencing as subject the purely human phenomenal/intentional manifold—and through his human will—*initiating* in some distinctive way the human acts of will that operate in the characteristic manner of human action.¹⁷

Pulling the threads together, the eternal Son of God is a divine person having essentially the divine omni-attributes. At a point in time, he co-created and in a mysterious manner grafted into himself a living human body, such that it was from its inception *his* body. Like other properly formed living human bodies, this body also exhibited the attributes of human, finite *personhood*; it was an unfolding sphere of changing, finite, perspectival phenomenal and intentional states (intellect) and of limited agency (will). But while there are two sets of distinctively personal capacities of intellect and will, human and divine, there is but one person. There is a single locus of subjectivity and agency, anchored in the divine mind, which is manifested in part through the embodied human mental capacities of Jesus of Nazareth. In this way, Jesus is fully human while being (metaphysically) unique among humans.¹⁸

II How to Be A Multiply-Incarnate Deity

Consider the person known as Jesus of Nazareth on earth and as Joshua of Namoth on Gliese 581g (thought to be the nearest planet outside our solar system that falls within the

¹⁷ We owe this suggestion to Brian Leftow (private correspondence).

¹⁸ As an aside, we suggest that it is worthwhile to think through this proposal by considering whether God could create a *purely creaturely* dual-nature person. (Scenario 1: equal natures, such as human-human. Scenario 2: unequal natures, such as human-“hobbit”.) We are not aware of anyone discussing such non-divine dual-nature scenarios. Our inclination is to suppose that only an omniscient mind could subsume a second nature without massive psychological fragmentation.

“habitable zone” of its solar system). And consider the suggestion that these apparently distinct persons are in fact the very same divine (multiply-creaturely-incarnated) person . This requires the possibility that one person can occupy two widely separated spatial regions. But note that it is not a case of multi-location of *bodies*, whereby one wholly material object wholly occupies more than one spatial region. (And that’s a good thing, for this kind of multi-location, though toyed with by some recent metaphysicians, is a highly problematic notion.¹⁹) For the two *bodies* of Jesus/Joshua are distinct objects, parts of the one person who lives through them. As we wrote just above, on the Incarnational picture we propose, these bodies, instances of human and Gliesian nature having mental as well as physical attributes, are inherently dependent entities, not proper substances in their own right. But insofar as we think of them in isolation from the one individual they partly compose, they are wholly distinct. To whom/what, then, does Peter refer when he points and says to John, “There is Jesus”? We take it that he refers to the *person* Jesus. So, if multiple incarnations are actual, he (unknowingly) refers to a person who also, perhaps simultaneously, occupies a planet far, far away. And if he says, “There is the body of Jesus,” he makes (on a natural disambiguation of what he says) a mistaken assumption of uniqueness. For the person Jesus has more than one body. Now, if he were philosophically savvier than we have reason to suspect the uneducated fisherman from Galilee really was, he could say truly, “There, and only there, is the *human* body of Jesus.”

Now, you might sense a more troublesome oddity when we turn from the body to the mind of Jesus. If Jesus of Nazareth is the very same person as Joshua of Namoth, the

¹⁹ See Shieva Kleinschmidt, “Multilocation and Mereology” *Philosophical Perspectives* 25 (2011), 253-276, for discussion of ways that multilocation would violate compelling axioms of mereology.

thought goes, then Jesus's mental states would seem to be very confused! He would be thinking, e.g., "John is my beloved disciple" and "Giles is my beloved disciple." But this thought itself rests on a confusion concerning the doctrine of Incarnation. Jesus is the incarnate Son of God. He has a fully divine and fully human mind, and these are distinct (albeit overlapping) ranges of thought of one person.²⁰ The restricted human mental life of Jesus will have no access to thoughts in the Gliesian mind, and vice versa. The human 'mind' of Jesus will presumably not even include awareness that he is incarnated on Gliese 581g. But the eternal Son of God is, in his divine mind, fully and simultaneously aware of all the thoughts flitting through both of the creaturely minds associated with the names 'Jesus' and 'Joshua'—that is, *his* creaturely minds. And this is just a special case—a special kind of "inside" knowledge, owing to his being incarnated as Jesus and Joshua—of his knowledge of *all* creaturely thoughts in Creation.²¹ There is, we suggested, but one center of subjectivity in this multiply-incarnated divine person. (We might think of the divine mind's awareness of the limited creaturely minds of his incarnations by a very loose analogy to our own awareness of the distinct deliverances of multiple sense modalities, centered in a single subjectivity.)

III A Theological Worry

According to the current proposal, if the Son of God can take on a human body/mind as a part of himself, he can take on (and perhaps has taken on) the natures of many, and

²⁰ Compare Thomas Morris's notion of an "asymmetric access relation" between the divine and human minds of the Son (*The Logic of God Incarnate*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986, 103ff.).

²¹ This matter of perspectival knowledge of course raises questions concerning the nature of omniscience, but we cannot address them here.

potentially infinitely many, other DIB species, without its being the case that any physical thing is wholly multi-located (throughout a single universe or among many) and without fragmentation of the divine mind, which serves as the center of subjectivity and agential control of the creaturely minds resulting from the many incarnations. Even if all this is granted, one might object that our proposal generates *theological* problems. We will confine our attention to a position parallel to Aquinas's on the eternity of the world: while it is metaphysically possible, the *actuality* of multiple incarnations is incompatible with what Christian Revelation teaches.

A number of New Testament passages seem to imply that God's redemptive purposes *for all of creation* are served by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus—i.e., by the actions performed by the Son of God through his human nature. Says the author of Colossians: "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in [Christ], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." (Col 1:19-20) And the writer of Ephesians adds that God's will is "to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ." (Eph 1:10) But the cohesiveness and comprehensiveness of Christ's redemptive work that these passages assert is undermined by our proposal (or so goes the objection). If there are many DIB species, and the Son of God redeems them and identifies with them by taking up each of their natures individually, then the acts of Jesus recorded in the New Testament do *not* serve to reconcile to God all things.

At one level, this worry can be dealt with pretty straightforwardly. Remember that the acts of Jesus recorded in the New Testament, and the acts of Joshua recorded in a Gliesian text (that is, alas, unavailable to us) are not acts of distinct persons but acts of

one and the same person, the Son of God. So on the contemplated multi-incarnational picture, it is indeed through Christ that God reconciles all things to himself, just not exclusively by those of his creaturely actions that are recorded in the New Testament. But it is entirely fitting that the human authors of these scriptural texts would know nothing of Christ's actions in distant galaxies or causally isolated universes. So our proposal does nothing to contradict what we take these passages to be saying, viz. that Christ's incarnate acts *in toto* make redemption possible for all reality, not just for human creatures.

However, there is a deeper and more interesting problem that these New Testament passages raise for our proposal, a problem regarding the eschatological picture that they suggest. The passages are commonly read as suggesting that Christ's work is necessary not only to *redeem* all things but also in an important way to *unify* all things, where this is taken to mean that it will ultimately usher in a harmonious and profoundly united *community* of all DIB creatures, under one authority, the Son of God.

As we see it, however, deep community seems possible only among creatures of broadly similar natures—who have broadly similar needs, who flourish in broadly similar environments, who can form relationships with one another, who can successfully communicate with each other, and so on. So given that DIB species would presumably *not* all share sufficiently similar natures, it is hard to see how deep community among all DIB creatures could be possible. And supposing that God the Son is incarnate in a multiplicity of DIB species, prospects for the envisioned *form* of unification look even stranger. Each species will have known God the Son in the 'dress' of its own nature. In *which* of Christ's creaturely natures would he present himself to a unified community of

radically diverse creatures? Any choice would be arbitrary. One might urge that the Son of God would not need to choose, because, in the eschaton, he will be known by creatures solely and directly through his Divine Nature, without the mediation of any creaturely nature. On this scenario, creatures will be transfigured in such a way that direct, spiritual encounter with God is possible. If so, perhaps this transfiguration will also serve to overcome differences between DIB natures such that a unified community is in fact possible. The trouble with this option is that it seems to violate one of the purposes that motivated God's becoming incarnate in the first place, namely, the permanent identification with and eschatological perfection of creaturely natures. If Barth and other theologians are correct that the incarnate Jesus Christ is "the real man," the fullest realization of *humanity*, then by parity we would expect a Gliesian incarnation, a fullest realization of *that* nature. The only apparent way that this consequence might be avoided is to assume that humans and Gliesians alike are to be transformed into something unrecognizable as distinctively human or Gliesian—a generically DIB nature. However, it seems more in keeping with the implicit theology of the New Testament that redeemed creation maintains its diversity.²² So we propose instead that distinct DIB species, if such there be, retain their distinctiveness. And we contend that it is consistent with the New Testament passages just cited to anticipate deep unity *within each community of DIB*

²² In Catholic and Eastern Orthodox theology, the term "communion of saints" is taken to encompass not only redeemed human beings but also the angels with whom they will join in the eternal worship of God. We take this teaching to be consistent with the points we are advancing here, namely, that (a) there is a profound, valuable form of experienced community had by and necessarily restricted to conspecifics, whether they be human, Gliesian, or whatever, (b) that there is a value to human beings in knowing God via his becoming one of us that is not realized by angelic beings and would not be realized by other DIB creatures apart from incarnation in their natures, and finally and similarly, (c) that the perfecting of human nature in Jesus's human incarnation would not carry over to other DIB natures apart from parallel incarnations.

creatures, with Christ as Lord of all such communities, and with each community retaining its God-affirmed peculiarity even as they participate in a common goal of union with God.²³

Conclusion

To recap: on our model, the divine Son's becoming incarnate is a matter of his becoming composite by taking on as a part an instance of a creaturely nature, complete with its ontologically emergent mental states but without a proprietary center of subjectivity and agency. He can then act through this creaturely nature in the manner and to the extent that the work of the Atonement requires. And he can repeat this process as many times as there are populations of creatures that bear the divine image—even if (as seems reasonably likely to us) there are infinitely many such populations. One divine Son acts among and on behalf of DIB creatures in the many DIB populations by being incarnated in and acting through an instance of each nature.

Given the number of contentious speculative matters on which this conclusion rests, it is fitting to end on a note of epistemic modesty. Throughout our discussion, we have touched on a number of topics central to Christian faith: God's rationality and will,

²³ Versions of this paper were delivered at the following conferences: 1st Midwest Annual Workshop in Metaphysics, St. Louis University; a conference on Leibniz's *Theodicy* in Lisbon; a workshop on God, Time, and Evil at Queen's University, Belfast; and a conference on Theism and the Multiverse at Ryerson University in Toronto. The penultimate draft was also discussed at a philosophy of religion reading group at Oriel College, Oxford. We thank the audiences at these events for a good deal of constructive feedback. We would like especially to thank Charity Anderson, Maria Rosa Antognazza, Matthew Benton, Jeff Brower, Robin Collins, Alicia Finch, Hud Hudson, Brian Leftow, Tim Mawson, Jeffrey McDonough, Timothy Pawl, Eleonore Stump, Richard Swinburne, Peter van Inwagen, Catherine Wilson, Dean Zimmerman, and the editor of this volume.

his reasons for creating, his relationship to those of his creatures that bear his image, his redemptive purposes and actions, and so forth. Not only do we presently lack the capacity to penetrate these mysteries, but we have good reason to disclaim our ever acquiring such a capacity. Nevertheless, we take it that our discussion demonstrates that the doctrine of the Incarnation is consistent both with our best philosophical theory of human nature and with scientifically- and theologically-motivated multiverse hypotheses—and this much more general thesis is itself a substantive philosophical conclusion.