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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Christ's dead limb

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Abstract

Is Christ hypostatically united to his human nature during Holy Saturday? If so, how, given that he is (in effect) an object whose parts are in different 'places'? In this article, I argue that God the Son does indeed remain hypostatically united to his human nature during Holy Saturday and that this is salvifically salient. One way to construe this ongoing union through somatic death is by means of the analogy of a 'dead limb' – Christ's human body being that limb. I set out several ways of making sense of this claim consistent with a broadly orthodox account of the hypostatic union as a contribution to the theology of Holy Saturday and the intermediate state more broadly.

Keywords: Christology; dead limb; dualism; Holy Saturday; materialism; personal ontology

> Yet we confess that Christ hung on the tree and lay in the tomb, but according to the flesh, and that he was in hell, but according to the soul alone.
>
> –Peter Lombard[1]

One of the traditional dogmatic puzzles attending the period between Christ's death and resurrection has to do with the persistence of the hypostatic union. During this period, Christ is in effect a scattered entity. The various 'parts' that compose him are in different locations. According to the canonical gospels, his corpse is taken down from the cross and laid in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, where it remains until Easter Sunday. In traditional Catholic doctrine, Christ's human soul is said to descend to the realm of the dead, where he preaches to the saints of the Old Testament, and takes them with him into the nearer presence of God destroying the gates of death in the process.[2] All the

[1]Peter Lombard, *The Sentences, Book 3: On the Incarnation of the Word*, trans. Guilio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2008), 3.22.2 (71), p. 95.

[2]Standard biblical references used to support the doctrine include Acts 2:24, Eph. 4:9, and 1 Pet. 3:19. The dogmatic basis for the doctrine is, of course, the clause in the Apostles' Creed which reads '*descendit ad inferos, tertia die resurrexit a mortuis*' ('he descended to the dead, [and] rose again on the third day'). One of the most accessible recent overviews of the history and development of the doctrine can be found in Preston McDaniel Hill and Catherine Ella Laufer, 'Jesus' Descent into Hell', in Brendan N. Wolfe et al.

while, the Second Person of the Trinity continues to uphold and sustain the cosmos *extra corpus sine mutandisque*. But how should we understand such claims today?

It might be thought that this concern about Christ being a scattered entity between his somatic death and resurrection is an idle worry. For surely it is no more of a problem than the traditional theological idea that all fallen humans must die whereupon their bodies and souls are separated until the general resurrection in the eschaton. If one thinks that we will all suffer the fate of being separated from our bodies at death, only to be reunited with them (or a facsimile of them) at the end of time when all are resurrected at the judgement seat of Christ, then it seems that the Christological application of this worry is just a particular instance of a more general theological concern.[3] We all suffer this indignity and, as a consequence, are separated from our bodies for some period between death and resurrection. So, Christ's human soul is separated from his body between his death and resurrection. But this is just the normal course of things post-fall. There is nothing peculiar about it.

However, even if the theologian thinks human beings are normally composed of bodies and souls, and that the soul is somehow disengaged from the body between somatic death and resurrection, the case of Christ is not analogous to this in several important respects. To begin with, God the Son is said to be hypostatically united to his human body from the first moment of the incarnation and forever after (the biblical basis for this can be found in the argument for Christ's perpetual priesthood in the order of Melchizedek in Hebrews 7). Even though he could *in principle* set aside his human nature, he will not: he is committed to the salvation of human beings, and this requires the incarnation, including the assumption of a complete human nature to which he is united thereafter without interruption (however we understand such things). What is more, his work between the physical death of his body on Good Friday and his resurrection on Easter Sunday is traditionally thought to be integral to the act of salvation.[4] The Christology of Holy Saturday, if we may call it that, must have some way of accounting for the continuation of the hypostatic union through that period if Christ is said to be redeeming fallen humankind (at least in part) by means of his death and

(eds.), *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/JesusDescentintoHell. A thorough recent treatment of the doctrine in Roman Catholicism can be found in Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007). The doctrine is not merely the preserve of Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, or high church Anglicanism, however. For a recent evangelical retrieval of the doctrine, see Matthew Y. Emerson, *'He Descended to the Dead': An Evangelical Theology of Holy Saturday* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019).

[3]I will not enter into the question of whether the resurrected human body is numerically the same as the body that dies. On the face of it, the Pauline notion of a spirit-powered resurrection body (*soma pneumatikon*) in 1 Corinthians 15 suggests something very different from our current terrestrial bodies. But his account is more indicative than definitive.

[4]As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* puts it, 'Christ went down into the depths of death so that 'the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live'.| Jesus, 'the Author of life', by dying destroyed 'him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and [delivered] all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage'. Henceforth the risen Christ holds 'the keys of Death and Hades', so that 'at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth'. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §635; https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/__P1R.HTM. There is some dispute about this in Reformed theology, but it seems to me that the atonement is not complete until Christ is resurrected. For discussion of the variety of views found in the theologians of the magisterial Reformation, see Joe Mock, 'The Reformers and the *Descendit* Clause', *Westminster Theological Journal* 83 (2021), pp. 275–97.

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resurrection. It would be no real act of salvation if, at a crucial juncture in his work, Christ were to temporarily cease to exist or have his various metaphysical 'parts' decoupled from one another thereby compromising the hypostatic union. After all, his work of salvation is the work of God incarnate, not the work of certain parts of God incarnate.[5] At each stage of his saving work, Christ acts as the God-human – a divine person united not to parts of human nature but to the whole. Only as one who is fully but not merely human, and hypostatically united to a divine person, can Christ bring about human salvation. Thus, the question of the continuity of the incarnation even in the midst of the disruption brought about by Christ's death on the cross is not an idle one, but in fact strikes at the heart of Christian soteriology. For this reason, it is a topic worthy of further consideration.

In this article, I will argue that Christ's human body between its death on Good Friday and resurrection on Easter Sunday is like a dead limb. This way of thinking was first suggested to me some years ago when reading the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. My argument here is, in fact, a simple extrapolation of the Lombard's reasoning. As he puts it, 'it was by one and the same union that he was united to the soul in hell and to the flesh in the tomb; and he was as united to those two, which had then become severed, as he had been to them before their separation, that is, before death'. He goes on to say, 'From all this, it is plainly shown that Christ was united to the flesh lying in the tomb, as he was to the soul in hell. Otherwise, if he had not been united to the dead flesh, he would not be said to have lain in it in the tomb.'[6]

Now, someone who sits or sleeps in an awkward position for too long will find that their arm or leg 'goes to sleep', so to speak. When they eventually attempt to move or wake up, the limb is unresponsive and numb for a few minutes until sensation is restored. Yet it is still the limb of the person to whom it is vitally connected even when temporarily non-functioning. In a similar fashion (and taking our cue from the Lombard), we might think of Christ's dead body as like a 'dead limb', which remains hypostatically united to God the Son, but inert until it is resurrected on Easter Sunday.

Suppose that is right. This still leaves us wondering about what happens to the human soul of Christ on Holy Saturday, which is a theologically controversial subject that has divided (most) Protestants from Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox with respect to the so-called 'harrowing of hell'.[7] It is also a matter that depends in important respects

[5]According to the ecumenical principle of the inseparable operations of the Trinity *ad extra*, the work of salvation is also traditionally thought to be the work of the whole Trinity, not just of God the Son (though according to the doctrine of appropriations a given divine work may be said to terminate upon a given divine person). Though this is an important consideration, our focus here is on the incarnation and the divine person who becomes incarnate. For more on the inseparable operations principle, see Oliver D. Crisp, *The Word Enfleshed: Exploring the Person and Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), and Adonis Vidu, *The Same God Who Works All Things: Inseparable Operations in Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2021).

[6]Lombard, *The Sentences, Book 3*, 3.22.2 (71), pp. 94–5.

[7]As is well known, Karl Barth has a very different 'take' on death and resurrection, including the death of Christ. But his views are a) difficult to make sense of as a whole, and b) eccentric as far as the history of the topic in Christian theology is concerned. Though fascinating, I cannot deal here with his position, laid out in §46 of his *Church Dogmatics*. For recent discussion of his views see Marc Cortez, *Embodied Souls, Ensouled Bodies* (London: T&T Clark, 2008); idem, 'Physicalism, the Incarnation, and Holy Saturday: A Conversation with Karl Barth', in R. Keith Loftin and Joshua. R. Farris (eds.), *Christian Physicalism? Philosophical Theological Criticisms* (London: Lexington Books, 2018), pp. 137–52; and David Lauber, *Barth on the Descent into Hell: God, Atonement, and the Christian Life* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

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on the personal ontology favoured by the given theologian. Those who are substance dualists about human beings will have to give some account of what happens to Christ's human soul at the moment of his bodily death, just as they would have to offer such explanation for the death of any other human being. Those divines who do not think humans have separable souls will have to say something about what happens to Christ's human nature postmortem just as they would with respect to other humans too.[8] I will not comment in detail on the topic of what happens to human souls or human minds upon somatic death here – that will have to be the subject for another day. Nevertheless, in tackling the question of whether Christ's body in the grave is a hypostatically united 'dead' limb we will have cause to say some things that relate to the question of the location of the soul of Christ on Holy Saturday if indeed humans, Christ included, have separable souls. In a bid to maximise the metaphysical options open to the theologian, rather than taking a specific position on this question at the outset I will set out versions of the dead limb story consistent with a substance dualist view as well as a materialist account of personal ontology.[9] The idea is to see what sort of view of personal ontology best fits with the claim that Christ's body is a 'dead' limb. To that end, two questions shape this essay. These are: (1) How does Christ remain intact as a person between his bodily death and resurrection if his various metaphysical 'parts' are separated from one another for this time? and (2) How are we to understand the relation of Christ's body and Christ's human soul to his divine nature during this period?

Two options on compositionalist personal ontology

To begin with, let me say a word about the metaphysical 'picture' of the incarnation with which I am working in this article. It is a version of compositionalism, construed along the lines of classical Christology, that is, the two-natures doctrine defined by the Council of Chalcedon in 451. On this view, Christ is said to be composed of several concrete 'parts': his divine nature and the human nature he assumes, which, in turn, is typically thought to include his human body and soul or mind, rightly configured. This is not the only live option in the metaphysics of the incarnation. One could, for example, say that Christ's human nature is a property acquired by God the Son in order to become incarnate. But space does not permit me to run a version of the dead limb argument on that basis as well. I invite those sympathetic to such a view to elaborate their own accounts of how Christ's human nature on Holy Saturday remains hypostatically united to God the Son.[10]

[8]Note that the materialism in view here is a *local* materialism. That is, it is a materialism about human persons. I presume that the default position in the Christian tradition is substance dualism when it comes to a *global* picture of what there is, for Christians have traditionally believed that God is a spirit (John 4:24) and that there are created spirits, too (e.g., angels).

[9]I will refer to 'materialist' views rather than 'physicalist' views in what follows, though the two terms are often used interchangeably. My reason for doing so is that in Christian theology there have been divines who have held that there are physical objects, but that these objects are not composed of matter. Clear examples of such a view can be found in the work of early modern idealists like Bishop George Berkeley and Jonathan Edwards. For a treatment of the incarnation from a Berkeleyian perspective, see Marc A. Hight and Joshua Bohannon, 'The Son More Visible: Immaterialism and the Incarnation', *Modern Theology* 26/1 (2010), pp. 120–48.

[10]For discussion of the issues sketched here, see Oliver D. Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity: The Incarnate Reconsidered* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007); idem, *The Word Enfleshed*; Tim Pawl, *In Defense of Conciliar*

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Now, as I have just indicated, according to compositionalists who are substance dualists when it comes to human personal ontology, Christ is composed of three 'parts': (1) a divine nature, plus a human nature composed of (2) a human body and (3) a human soul, rightly configured. However, one could be a compositionalist who denies that human persons normally have a separable substantial soul. By 'separable substantial soul' I mean an essentially immaterial created substance that is the primary bearer of personal identity across time. The various components of this definition may be broken down as follows: something is *immaterial* if it is not composed of matter (e.g., spirits, abstract objects); to be *created* is to have been brought into existence by God (including, e.g., humans, planets, stars and the cosmos taken as a whole); *substances* are property bearers that may exist independently of other such property bearers (e.g., organisms like lions, human persons), and such independently existing substances are often called fundamental substances or supposits. Separable substantial souls are thus intimately connected with the human body whose souls they are, and yet are in principle separable from that body (e.g., upon somatic death).[11]

So, a compositionalist about Christology who denies that human persons have a separable substantial soul also denies that humans have an immaterial substance as a metaphysically constituent 'part'.[12] (Importantly, such a claim does not preclude the belief that humans have minds that are distinct from their bodies in some important sense. For instance, it could be that human minds are irreducible properties of properly functioning human beings.) Such theologians would hold to a two-part compositional picture of the incarnation, comprising (1) the divine nature and a human nature comprised of (2) a human body only, which has a human mind as a property – and thus not as a concrete part. Although properties may be instantiated in concrete things (such as when blueness is instantiated in the shirt), they are not themselves concrete things but rather abstract objects.

There are a range of different views about personal ontology that are consistent with this materialist perspective on the composition of human beings. But we need not go into such details here. For, to repeat: what we are after is a way of thinking about human personal ontology that maximises the number of metaphysical options on the table, as it were, rather than reducing those options or specifying which is the most plausible.[13] Taking up where the Lombard left off, our task is to give an account of compositional Christology that can motivate the claim that the various metaphysical 'parts' of Christ still constituted one hypostatic theanthropic person, that is, the one God-human whose human nature remained personally united to his divine nature without interruption or dissolution between the bodily death of Christ on Good Friday and his resurrection on Easter Sunday.

Christology: A Philosophical Essay (Oxford: OUP, 2020), ch. 1; and the essays collected in Anna Marmadoro and Jonathan Hill (eds.), *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation* (Oxford: OUP, 2011).

[11]At least, that is the story typical in Christian theology. I suppose that one could hold that souls cannot exist as separable substances apart from their bodies, as Aristotle and (perhaps) Barth seem to have thought. But that has not been a typical view in historic Christianity.

[12]I will say something about hylomorphist views later in this essay, given that they are a complication to the picture being sketched here.

[13]I am presuming that more than one metaphysical option about human personal ontology is plausible. That is a somewhat controversial assumption, but it seems to me that these matters are sufficiently mysterious that it is safer to maximise the options than to reduce them. Such a methodological desideratum appears even more prudent when we add in the complications attending Christology.

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Thus, for present purposes, let us divide Christological compositionalists into two broad groups that track with the provisos just given. We shall call them *compositionalist-dualists* and *compositionalist-materialists*, respectively.

Two dead limb stories

The next step is to put these two accounts to the test as explanations of how Christ may remain hypostatically united to his human nature during Holy Saturday when his human body is dead in the tomb. I shall present these two accounts in the form of two metaphysical just-so stories, which will help the reader to get a conceptual grip on the views under scrutiny. Then we will be in a position to consider the relative merits of these two ways of making sense of what I shall dub the dead limb argument for the continuity of the incarnation between Christ's somatic death and resurrection, or *the dead limb argument* for short.

Here is the first story:

COMPOSITIONALIST-DUALIST DEAD LIMB STORY

At the moment of his death on the cross, Christ's human body ceases to function; it becomes a corpse. At that very moment, his human soul is decoupled from his human body and passes from this world to the next. Thereafter from the moment of his somatic death to the moment of bodily resurrection on Easter Sunday morning, Christ is in effect a scattered entity. Although the parts of his human and divine natures remain hypostatically united to God the Son without interruption or diminution during this period, they are 'located' in different 'places.' His human corpse occupies a particular region of space in the tomb where it is laid. His human soul is elsewhere, being 'located' in a region of the afterlife. His divine nature remains personally united to these 'parts' of his human nature whilst also continuing to uphold and sustain the created order. We might think of Christ's dead body in the tomb as a kind of dead limb that remains vitally connected with the person who sustains it (in this case, God the Son), but which is non-functioning for a period of time (viz., between his somatic death and resurrection). Someone who sits or sleeps in an awkward position for too long often finds that one or more of their limbs have 'gone to sleep', so to speak, upon waking up. When they eventually attempt to move, the limb is unresponsive and numb until sensation is restored. Similarly, Christ's 'dead limb' (i.e., his dead human body) remains hypostatically united to God the Son, but inert until it is resurrected on Easter Sunday.

I presume most Christians will prefer something like this story, for most Christians have been substance dualists of some sort. Be that as it may, here is the second story:

COMPOSITIONALIST-MATERIALIST DEAD LIMB STORY

At the moment of his death on the cross, Christ's human body ceases to function; it becomes a corpse. At that very moment, his human mind, which is a property or cluster of properties that give rise to a unique first-person perspective that supervenes upon, or emerges from the material organisation of his brain, also ceases to function. (Note, it could be that his human mind ceases to exist from his bodily death to his resurrection on Easter Sunday. In that case, Christ's human nature has a 'gappy' conscious existence. Alternatively, it could be that his mind merely stops functioning during the period of

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somatic death, rather like the electric light bulb that ceases to illuminate a room when the electricity that feeds it is switched off.) Thereafter from the moment of his somatic death to the moment of bodily resurrection on Easter Sunday morning, Christ is an entity, some of whose 'parts' are (temporarily) non-functioning or dead. Although the parts of his human and divine natures remain hypostatically united to God the Son without interruption or diminution during this period, they are 'located' in different 'places'. His human body occupies a particular region of space in the tomb where it is laid. His human mind is literally nowhere. It either temporarily ceases to exist or is, as it were, 'switched off' or non-functioning at the moment of somatic death. Nevertheless, it will begin to function once more once the body is resurrected (as is the case with all human beings in this respect, given a Christian physicalist anthropology). His divine nature remains personally united to the 'parts' of his human nature whilst also continuing to uphold and sustain the created order. We might think of Christ's corpse in the tomb as a kind of dead limb that remains vitally connected with the person who sustains it (in this case, God the Son), but which is non-functioning for a period of time (viz., between his somatic death and resurrection). His human mind, being a property of his human nature, would be non-functioning once his body becomes a corpse. Its proper functioning is dependent upon a properly functioning, living human body (or at least, a properly functioning brain and central nervous system). Someone who sits or sleeps in an awkward position for too long often finds that one or more of their limbs have 'gone to sleep', so to speak, when they wake up. When they eventually attempt to move the limb is unresponsive and numb until sensation is restored. Similarly, we can think of Christ's dead body plus his non-functioning mind as like a 'dead limb.' It remains hypostatically united to God the Son, but inert until it is resurrected on Easter Sunday.

Comments on the two dead limb stories

With these two dead limb stories in place, we can turn to expounding and defending the key theological claims they each make.

First, let us consider the conceptual core that the two versions of the tale have in common, for this is the primary target of our dogmatic argument. The central claim is that between his somatic death and resurrection on Easter Sunday, Christ's human body may be thought of as akin to a dead limb. This preserves the soteriologically vital notion that God the Son remains hypostatically united to his human nature throughout the period of his passion, including Holy Saturday when his human body is in the grave. Because he remains personally united to his human nature throughout this period, he can act as a saviour for humanity. In the background to this claim is the two-natures doctrine of classical (viz., Chalcedonian) Christology, according to which Christ must be wholly human and wholly divine in order to bring about his work of reconciliation.

Were he to divest himself of the union between his two natures for some period during which he was acting in his capacity as saviour, that would interrupt and imperil the saving act. To see how this would be the case, consider the act of wirelessly downloading a programme to your computer. If the wireless connection to your Wi-Fi hub is interrupted during the download, it will fail to complete the action. Just so, in the incarnation, any interruption to the personal union between Christ's two natures during his work as mediator would, in effect, disrupt or disable the completion of the work. A soteriological assumption shared by defenders of classical Christology is that the hypostatic union is a *sine qua non* for incarnation and (therefore) atonement.

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Now, one worry here is that the separation of the 'parts' of the composite Christ at the moment of somatic death on the cross does in fact jeopardise the hypostatic union. Separating the light bulb from its socket will normally mean that it cannot illuminate the room, since it is no longer appropriately connected to a source of electrical current. What the dead limb stories suggest is that this need not be the case with Christ. Even if the 'parts' of his two natures are decoupled from each other so that, say, his human soul and human body are no longer rightly configured, they are still personally united to God the Son. We might put it like this: the somatic death of Christ may decouple the 'parts' of his human nature from one another, but they remain coupled with the divine person who sustains them. Thus, they remain hypostatically united to God the Son directly through their ongoing and uninterrupted connection with a divine person. To return to the light bulb analogy, if one decouples the bulb from its socket, but then connects the bulb via another cable to the same circuit as the socket, they will both be connected to a source of electricity via the same circuit, even though the parts of the bulb and its socket are no longer connect to one another. They remain 'united' with the electrical circuit that feeds them the electrical current. This is the sort of claim being made here in both dead limb stories with respect to Christ's human nature during Holy Saturday.

What about the things which distinguish the two stories? Let us turn to these next.

The most obvious difference, which we have already discussed, pertains to the personal ontologies that underpin these two stories. On the face of it, despite their very different conceptions of human personhood, these two accounts appear to be consistent with the claims of classical Christology and provide a coherent understanding of how Christ's human nature is a 'dead limb' during Holy Saturday. Those who adopt a version of the compositionalist-substance dualist view can tell a fairly straightforward story about what happens to the 'parts' of Christ during this period, which will fit well with either the traditional Catholic notion of the harrowing of hell or of Protestant accounts of Christ's passion that do not think Christ literally descends to the dead to preach to the faithful there.[14] Those who defend such a view will not have much difficulty aligning their view with the Christian tradition. Rather, they will have to pay attention to how this traditional sort of view sits with current scientific and philosophical notions of personal ontology, the majority of which have discarded substance dualism.[15]

What the compositionalist-materialist wants to say is that, normally speaking, a human being is comprised of a human body plus a human mind, rightly configured – but that this human mind is not a substantial soul. It is, rather, a property (or set of properties) of the human organism that is not reducible to some non-mental physical feature of the body. Now, the compositionalist-materialist has some work to do in the case of Christology. Although it may appear reasonable to think that mere humans are material objects whose minds are properties of their bodies rather than a separable substantial soul, this poses certain problems for Christological orthodoxy. For, as I have

[14]See, e.g., John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press 1960 [1559]), 2.16. 8–12. See also Preston McDaniel Hill, 'Feeling Forsaken: Christ's Descent into Hell in the Theology of John Calvin (PhD Thesis, University of St Andrews, 2021); https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/handle/10023/23552.

[15]That said, there is a resurgence of work on substance dualisms of various stripes, including defences of a substance dualist account of personal ontology relevant to our concerns here. See, e.g., the essays in Loftin and Farris (eds.), *Christian Physicalism?* Recent defences of substance dualism by Christian philosophers include Brandon Rickabaugh and J. P. Moreland, *The Substance of Consciousness: A Comprehensive Defence of Contemporary Substance Dualism* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2023); and Richard Swinburne, *Mind, Brain, and Free Will* (Oxford: OUP, 2013).

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just indicated above, the two-natures doctrine of classical Christology presumes Christ has a human body and a human soul, and that this is requisite for him to exemplify a *complete* human nature.[16] In light of this claim of classical Christology, an obvious criticism of compositionalist-materialism is that it is difficult to see how its defenders can square their metaphysical commitments with the traditional Christological claim that the complete human nature of God incarnate comprises a human body and human soul, rightly configured. For, *ex hypothesi*, compositionalist-materialism cannot make metaphysical room for substantial human souls.[17]

Now, one might respond to this challenge by noting that while the fathers of the ecumenical Council of Chalcedon do state that Christ has a human body and rational soul (*psychē logikē*), it is also the case, as Richard Swinburne has pointed out, that this language is ambiguous as far as contemporary philosophy of mind is concerned.[18] A rational soul could be construed as a mind rather than as a separable substantial soul. To be sure, Swinburne observes that the fathers of Chalcedon, in declaring that Christ had a rational soul, seem to have meant a substantial (human) soul. However, as he goes on to say,

> [t]he Council could not have meant by this that there were in Christ both a divine and a human soul in my sense of 'soul' [i.e., a separable substantial soul]. For that would have been to say that Christ was two individuals, a doctrine to which Chalcedon was greatly opposed. Rather in the affirmation that Christ had a 'reasonable soul', 'soul' is to be understood in an Aristotelian sense; and so the affirmation is to be understood as saying that Christ had a human way of thinking and acting, as well as his divine way.[19]

On the one hand, this line of reasoning opens the door to a version of compositional-materialism compatible with Chalcedon; on the other hand, talk of a human way of thinking and acting is so ontologically vague as to be of little theological use. For almost no sensible person will deny that there is a human way of thinking and acting. The question is what that entails, and it seems to me that it is very difficult to see how someone who is committed to materialism in the strictest sense with respect to philosophy of mind (viz., mental reduction or full-blown eliminativism) could embrace the tenets of Chalcedonian Christology. But that still leaves open a very wide range of permissible views that fall under the descriptor 'compositional materialism.'

[16]The Chalcedonian 'definition' of the person of Christ puts it like this: 'We, then, following the holy Fathers … confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body'. The Greek phrase for 'reasonable soul' is *psychēs logikēs*, which was added to the statement in order to block the teaching of Apollinaris, who taught that God the Son took the place of a rational soul in Christ, who possessed only a human body (*sōma*) and animal soul (*psychē alogos*). For the Greek text and a (Victorian) English translation and critical apparatus, see Phillip Schaff (ed.), *The Creeds of Christendom, Vol. II* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), pp. 63–5.

[17]For discussion of this point in relation to three live options in Christian materialism, see Jason McMartin, 'Holy Saturday and Christian Theological Anthropology', in Loftin and Farris (eds.), *Christian Physicalism?*, pp. 117–36.

[18]Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford: OUP, 1994), ch. 9.

[19]Ibid., pp. 196–7. For a rather different account of patristic personal ontology, see Paul Gavrilyuk, 'The Incorporeality of the Soul in Patristic Thought' in Farris and Loftin (eds.), *Christian Physicalism?*, pp. 1–26.

Rather than give a taxonomy of different views that fit this description, I will outline one such view before turning to the vexed questions of hylomorphism. In previous work on the topic, I have defended a version of materialist Christology that does not, I think, require a departure from theological orthodoxy.[20] In this view, human beings instantiate two distinct sorts of properties. The first we might call mental properties since they are properties that pertain to human mental life. The second we can designate physical properties, having to do with human physical life. Now, although mental properties are distinct from physical properties, it is still the case that the mental properties a person possesses are normally dependent upon the physical properties of a person. On this account, if a human being suffers a serious head injury and brain damage in a car accident, then their mental life may be adversely affected. Suppose a person suffers such a serious head trauma, such that they are thereafter incapable of reasoning or agency (viz., higher brain functions), though they are still alive (perhaps with the aid of artificial life support). In other words, on this way of thinking, though the mental life of a human person is distinct from their physical life (as reflected in the claim about distinct properties that human persons instantiate), their mental life depends in an important sense upon the proper functioning of their physical bodies, and in particular, their brain and central nervous system.

Clearly, this may be applied to the compositional-materialist dead limb story. Equally clearly, the upshot will be an account of the persistence of the hypostatic union through Holy Saturday that looks rather different from that offered by the substance dualist, though on its face it also seems compatible with the theological framework of the two natures doctrine of classical Christology. But it does seem that given compositional-materialism, upon his physical death on the cross Christ's human mind becomes inert, either ceasing to function or temporarily ceasing to exist until Christ's resurrection on Easter Sunday. This is a theological cost of sorts, though one that Christian materialists may be willing to stomach, given their metaphysical commitments in personal ontology.

A limit case: hylomorphism

Not all accounts of personal ontology fit neatly into our two categories, however. One obvious exception is hylomorphism – particularly Christian versions of hylomorphism, such as that developed by Thomas Aquinas. Given the prevalence of such views in the Christian tradition up to the present, we cannot conclude our discussion without some reference to this alternative.

On the hylomorphist understanding of human personal ontology, human beings are composed of matter that is organised by a substantial form, which we call the soul. Beyond this brief description, there is wide disagreement about the entailments of this view. Some characterise hylomorphism as a doctrine consistent with materialism about human persons. Others think of it as a clear example of substance dualism, because the soul may exist apart from the body in the intermediate state thanks to the miraculous preserving power of the Deity. Still, other scholars think of hylomorphism as occupying a kind of middle ontological ground between substance dualists and materialists.[21]

[20]See Oliver D. Crisp, *God Incarnate: Explorations in Christology* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), ch. 7.

[21]For references to these different views in the Thomist literature, see Thomas Atkinson, 'Christian Physicalism: Against the Medieval Divines', in Loftin and Farris (eds.), *Christian Physicalism?*, pp. 27–42.

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I am inclined to side with this last group, who think of hylomorphist personal ontology as a kind of *via media*. This is because it does share aspects of both the substance dualist and materialist accounts as I have distinguished them thus far, though it does not seem to fit either of these alternatives in any neat fashion. Like the substance dualist, the hylomorphist thinks that at certain times humans have souls that exist independently of the human body. This occurs at somatic death when the soul is preserved in the intermediate state by the power of God until the resurrection of the body, whereupon it becomes the form of the body once more. Nevertheless, it seems like the disembodied state of the soul is rather attenuated and does not represent the complete human person. Instead, it is something like the metaphysical residue of a human person that cannot be metaphysically 'complete' until it is rejoined with a suitable parcel of matter that it may organise as its form. But like the materialist, the hylomorphist thinks that when embodied, the soul of the human being is a kind of structuring principle or pattern that makes the matter that composes the human a human animal. What is more, the soul is extended and distributed throughout the body of which it is the form. It does not exist as some distinct immaterial thing that is tethered to the body in some fashion, as caricatures of Cartesianism suggest.[22]

According to this brief characterisation, a Christian hylomorphic account of the human nature of Christ on Holy Saturday is more like the compositional-dualist dead limb story than the compositionalist-materialist dead limb story. Although prior to his somatic death, Christ's human nature comprises a soul-plus-body compound, where the soul is the organising principle of the body that is located and distributed throughout the body, at his death, Christ's human soul is decoupled from his corpse and is transferred to the afterlife by the miraculous power of God. Thereafter, at the moment of resurrection, his soul is reintegrated into his corpse and organises its matter into the human nature of Christ once more.

There is a resurgence of interest in hylomorphic personal ontology at present among Christian philosophers and theologians. It is not hard to see why, given the fact that it delivers much that will commend it to both defenders of traditional Christian theism (including classical Christology), as well as being a view that seems commensurate with much of the materialist literature in philosophy of mind. It is not without cost, of course.[23] But that is true of any substantive metaphysical doctrine. As the truism has it, one must pay one's money and take one's choice, including the costs of the position for which one opts.

Conclusion

I think the dead limb argument may have a wide appeal as a way of trying to make sense of the continuation of the hypostatic union through Holy Saturday when the various 'parts' of Christ seem to be scattered. Some will be willing to adopt it along with the version of compositionalism I have articulated here. Others will differ on the theological anthropology but may still transpose the dead limb argument to their own preferred

[22]For a view of Christian hylomorphism similar to that outlined here, see Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003), ch. 6.

[23]One consequence of this view that seems very strange to me is that at one moment a human person is identical with a material object, and at another moment that same person is identical with an immaterial object. It is difficult to understand how one and the same thing can undergo such a radical change over time.

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metaphysics of human persons. Still, others will disagree about their preferred model of the incarnation and yet find some version of the dead limb story amenable. That is all to the good since I am trying to maximise the metaphysical options consistent with the dead limb stories I have told. Yet, in all this, we have not directly tackled the question of how such a view is consistent with the traditional Catholic doctrine of the harrowing of hell. This is a staple of much historic Christianity. As I mentioned in the introduction, in its traditional garb this doctrine suggests that Christ has a human soul that is separated at somatic death and that enters the realm of the dead to conquer death and release those who have died in hope of the atonement. But that is not the only feasible way of thinking about this doctrine, as Calvin's example demonstrates (Barth being another). Tackling that doctrine will have to wait for another occasion. However, some versions of the dead limb story may provide theological resources with which to approach it.

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