

## **Hylomorphism and the Incarnation<sup>1</sup>**

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The Christian doctrine of the Incarnation tells us that the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, became incarnate as a first-century man, Jesus of Nazareth. According to the doctrine, the Son took on a human nature while at the same time retaining his divine nature. Thus, he became a two-natured individual. He also acquired distinctively human parts and characteristics—among them, a human body and soul. What the doctrine does not tell us, however, is what the relations are supposed to be between the various ‘elements’ involved in the incarnation: the divine nature, the human nature, the body of Jesus, the human soul of Jesus, the man Jesus, and the Son of God.

The history of metaphysical speculation on the doctrine provides us with a bewildering variety of options. Some identify the human nature with the mereological sum of the body and soul; others insist that natures are abstracta and that the proposed identification therefore makes no sense. Some identify the Son with Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus, in turn, with the sum of his two natures. Others say that the Son merely ‘inhabited’ the human nature (construed as a concrete object) as if it were a sort of outer garment. Some say that the Son functioned as the

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soul of Jesus' body and in so doing became a human soul. Others say that Jesus had two souls—one human and one divine. We could carry on with this list for quite a while.<sup>2</sup>

Discussion of the relations among the elements involved in the incarnation usually arises in contexts where the main question in view is something like, “How can we coherently suppose that a fully divine being has some of the very specific and distinctively human limitations that Jesus is represented as having—e.g., ignorance of the time of the Second Coming, or the ‘ability’ to *grow* in wisdom.” Addressing this question usually requires at least a brief foray into controversies about the nature of natures and about what, exactly, would be involved in having multiple natures; but, in the contemporary literature at any rate, these issues tend not to take center stage. It is also common for views about the metaphysics of the incarnation to be developed independently of views about the metaphysics of the trinity—in some cases with the result that an author’s views about the incarnation are in tension with his or her views about the trinity.<sup>3</sup> Both tendencies in the literature seem methodologically problematic, the latter especially so.

My goal in this paper, then, is to provide a metaphysical account of the incarnation that starts from substantive assumptions about the nature of natures and about the metaphysics of the trinity and that develops in light of these a story about the relations among the elements involved

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<sup>2</sup> For a valuable critical survey of the major positions in the contemporary and historical literature, including references to the sorts of views just mentioned, see Cross 2009. See also Adams 2006, Ch. 5, Crisp 2007, Ch. 2, and Part I of Cross 2002 for further explanation and critical discussion of some of these views.

<sup>3</sup>For example, advocating the view that human persons are material whereas divine persons are (normally) immaterial, Trenton Merricks (2007) argues that the incarnation is best understood as involving the Son of God *becoming a material object*—namely, Jesus of Nazareth. Yet, with regard to the Trinity, he argues that the relation between the divine persons is to be understood on analogy with the distinct spheres of consciousness of a split-brain patient. (Merricks 2006) It is, at the very least, difficult to see how the *incarnate* second person of the Trinity (a material object) could be related to the (immaterial) other persons of the Trinity in the way that the spheres of consciousness of a split-brain patient are related. Or, to take another example: Thomas Flint, in the conference version of his contribution to the present volume (Flint 2009), sets up the central problem in his paper by assuming that the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, is *identical to* the divine nature of the incarnate Christ. But, of course, if the Son is identical to the divine nature then it is very hard to see how the Son could also *share* his divine nature with the Father and the Spirit.

in the incarnation. Central to the view I will describe are two features of Aristotle's metaphysics, though I do not claim that my own development of these ideas is anything of which Aristotle himself would have approved: (i) a hylomorphic understanding of material objects, (ii) a doctrine of numerical sameness without identity, and (iii) the view that the *nature* of a thing can appropriately be identified with its *form*. These ideas, along with other important aspects of the metaphysical framework with which I shall be working, are laid out in the first five sections below, followed in the sixth section by a brief sketch of the account of the trinity that Jeffrey Brower and I have presented in detail elsewhere. In the final section, I present my account of the incarnation.

## 1. THE BASIC FRAMEWORK AND THE NEO-ARISTOTELIAN THEORY

Central to Aristotle's metaphysics is the idea that every material object is a structured entity with two constituents, matter and form. Explanations of these concepts commonly encourage the thought that *matter* is the stuff of which something is made whereas a *form* is a property, like humanity or felinity, instantiation of which accounts for an object's being the kind of thing that it is. It is furthermore common to characterize Aristotelian forms as abstract, immanent universals. I won't comment here on the extent to which these common characterizations are correct as interpretations of Aristotle's views.<sup>4</sup> I note them simply to acknowledge awareness of them, even as I depart from them in articulating my own story about matter and form.

Natures, for Aristotle, are internal principles of change and rest; and talk of *the nature* of a material substance will primarily involve reference to its form. Although Aristotle

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<sup>4</sup> But see, e.g., Witt 1989, wherein it is argued that forms are not properties and not universals but rather, individuals. Cf. also Koslicki 2008:252ff.

acknowledges that both matter and form each have some claim to being called ‘the nature’ of a material substance, he indicates that form has the greater, or primary claim.<sup>5</sup> What tips the scale in favor of form is, in a nutshell, the fact that forms, on his view, determine kind-membership for a substance and provide more fundamental explanations of its behavior and development.<sup>6</sup> For material substances, then, *sharing* a nature will primarily involve sharing a common form.

Within Aristotle’s metaphysics, matter is shareable as well. The best-known examples used to illustrate this involve material substances (e.g., Socrates) and substance-accident compounds (e.g., seated-Socrates, which exists when and only when Socrates is seated) that are made of the very same stuff.<sup>7</sup> Things that share matter in this way are, on Aristotle’s view, numerically the same, but not identical—of which more below.

All that I have said in this section thus far (minus what I have called the ‘common characterizations’ of matter and form) is what I shall have in mind when I talk below of the ‘basic (Aristotelian) framework’.

Like many philosophers, both contemporary and historical, I think that the basic framework offers fruitful resources not only for solving central problems in metaphysics, but also for explicating and solving problems with central doctrines of Christianity. My own use of it, however, depends on thinking of matter and form in such a way that even *immaterial* things might be said to have a matter-form structure. As shall become clear below, I also find it useful to allow that one and the same thing can be the form of one object and the matter of another. Thus, as I have already indicated, I find it difficult to endorse, without a lot of qualifying

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<sup>5</sup> *Physics* II.1, esp. 193b8-19. See also *Metaphysics* IV.4 1014a35-b19 and *Metaphysics* VII.3 1029a5-7, and Loux 1991 81-82 and Ch. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Waterlow 1982: 58 – 66 and Witt 1989: 65 – 79. These passages in Waterlow and Witt focus primarily on the *Physics*. On case for form in the *Metaphysics* see Loux 1991, esp. Chs. 3 and 5.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., *Topics* I.7 103a23-31 and *Metaphysics* IV.6 1015b16-27. Perhaps all of Aristotle’s examples are like these, but I cannot claim to have examined the entire corpus.

assumptions, the idea that matter is stuff and forms are kind-properties. I also find it difficult, for other reasons, to endorse various other familiar claims about matter, forms, and natures—e.g., that matter is ‘potentiality’, or that forms (and therefore natures) are final causes or ‘principles of life’.<sup>8</sup> One reason why I am not inclined to endorse these claims is that the central terms, like ‘potentiality’ and ‘final cause’, either are, or are explained in terms of, primitive concepts that I think many contemporary metaphysicians will find unintelligible. Though I am somewhat skeptical of claims to the effect that ‘my primitives are more intelligible than yours’, I would prefer to develop a metaphysic that retains some of the central aspects of the basic Aristotelian framework (in particular, a place for some of the central *roles* associated with the concepts of matter, form, and nature, as well as the relation of numerical sameness without identity) but whose explanations invoke primitives whose intelligibility is more widely acknowledged by contemporary metaphysicians.

For purposes of this paper, then, I want to work with what is probably best thought of as a *neo-Aristotelian* theory of natures and substances. This theory can be roughly divided into two parts: the *Aristotelian* part and the *neo* part. The ‘neo’ part of the theory attempts to forge connections between contemporary ideas about *powers* and *fundamental properties* on the one hand and, on the other hand, certain Aristotelian ideas about natures and forms—namely, that whatever plays the role of form is also suited to play the role of nature, that natures are intimately connected with the distinctive powers and capacities of their corresponding natural kinds, and that natures are principles of unity.

Let us start, then, with the Aristotelian part of the theory.

- (T1) Every substance that is not a nature is a compound of matter and form.
- (T2) Forms are *constituents* of objects, not transcendent universals.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Witt 1989:68, 126ff.

I have discussed these two claims to some extent already at the beginning of this section; but let me add here just two further comments. First, note that T1 allows that natures are substances. I believe that this is Aristotle's view as well, but there are controversies in the neighborhood that I have neither the space nor the expertise to discuss in appropriate detail.<sup>9</sup> I do not here mean to take a position on those controversies. Second, hylomorphic compounding is not the same as composition, or mereological summation.<sup>10</sup> In my terminology, matter and form are constituents of material objects, but not parts. I don't suppose that there is any pre-theoretical distinction to be drawn between parts and constituents. But I do think that there is a substantive, and probably pre-theoretical, distinction to be drawn between composition (or summation) construed as an operation on concrete particulars and the sort of compounding that might take place between stuff and a form or between a concrete particular and a form. Even a child can grasp the idea of imposing a form upon a piece of clay; but it would be a substantially further step—and one that I am not inclined to take—to regard the form of a statue as one of its *parts*.<sup>11</sup> The terminological distinctions between parts and constituents and between summation and compounding are meant to help us keep track of that difference.

The *neo* part of the theory involves three further claims about the nature and function of *natures*:

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<sup>9</sup> But see, for starters, Loux 1991.

<sup>10</sup> Whether composition and mereological summation are the same depends in part on whether one wants to reserve the term 'mereology' for, e.g., classical extensional mereology while at the same time denying that composition obeys the axioms of that system. My point here is just that compounding should not be assimilated to either. Alternatively, one might suggest endorse *compositional pluralism*, the view that there are multiple fundamental composition relations; and one might then say (e.g.) that mereological summation and compounding are two such relations. (Cf. McDaniel 2009, as well as the remarks about Fine in note 11.) I am not, in principle, opposed to this way of talking; but it does represent a different terminological choice from what I have opted for here.

<sup>11</sup> My hylomorphism differs in at least this respect, then, from that of Johnston (2006) and Koslicki (2008). Fine (2008) suggests that forms are parts, but not the sorts of parts that are joined by *fusion*. (Cf. also Fine 1999.) Perhaps, then, our difference on this score is merely terminological. There are, of course, other differences, however.

- (T3) Natures are fundamental powers.<sup>12</sup>
- (T4) The natures of composite objects *unite* other powers (in particular, the powers that are the natures of their parts).
- (T5) Natures can enter into compounds with *individuators*, and with *distinguishing properties*. In compounds with *individuators*, natures play the role of form; in compounds with *distinguishing properties*, they play the role of matter.

Each of T3 – T5 requires comment and, in the case of T4 and T5, explication of central terms. I'll take each in turn.

## 2. NATURES AS FUNDAMENTAL POWERS

In saying that natures are fundamental powers, I mean three things. First, they are perfectly natural properties—not in the sense that contrasts with ‘supernatural’, but rather in the sense of marking objective similarities and joints in nature. (Cf. Lewis 1983) Second, they are not reducible to other powers. The power to tell a lie, for example, is reducible (if it is a genuine power at all). It is nothing over and above the more basic powers involved in its exercise: the power to form beliefs, the power to speak, the power to entertain false propositions and to intend to report them as true, and so on. Negative charge, on the other hand, is plausibly non-reducible, and so fundamental. Third, they ground non-natural powers or, if there are no such things, they explain the truth of (putative) non-natural power-attributions. For example: Fundamental particles have the power to repel other fundamental particles. If there really is such a thing as *the power to repel other fundamental particles*, presumably it is a non-natural power that is grounded in one of two plausibly fundamental powers—negative or positive charge. (For

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<sup>12</sup> I have located ‘T3’ in the ‘neo’ section not because I think that Aristotle would disagree with it (I don’t). Rather, I have located it here simply to avoid having to defend the claim that it belongs in the ‘clearly Aristotelian’ part.

purposes here, I'll follow George Molnar in my understanding of grounding: "The ground of a power, P, is the set of properties (all of which are conceptually distinct from P) by virtue of which a thing has P." (2003:147)) On the other hand, if there is no such thing as the power to repel other fundamental particles, still, the claim that fundamental particles have that power will be made true by facts about fundamental powers; and so the fundamental powers will explain the truth of that power-attribution. I take it that the difference between reducible powers and non-reducible non-natural powers roughly corresponds to the difference between conjunctive properties and irreducibly disjunctive properties.<sup>13</sup>

I should also say what I don't mean by the claim that natures are fundamental powers. Most importantly, I don't mean to say that natures are 'basic' in the sense of being entities upon which all other things depend for their existence. For example, it might turn out that the natures of composite objects depend in some sense upon the natures of their parts. Also, I don't mean to take any position on the question of whether there are fundamental empirical properties beyond those investigated by physics. If there are, then perhaps there are biological and chemical natures as well as physical natures; or perhaps there are mental natures. If there aren't, then the only natures exemplified by material things are natures of physical objects. Of course, the doctrine of the incarnation is committed to the existence of human nature and the nature of God. But I don't think anyone would say that the divine nature is a fundamental *empirical* property; and it is an open question both philosophically and from the point of view of traditional Christian doctrine whether humanity is.

In saying that natures are powers *and* that natures can play the role of form, it might seem that, from the point of view of traditional hylomorphism, I have got my metaphysics upside

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<sup>13</sup> This is not to say, of course, that there is no overlap between the two. I.e., if there are indeed both conjunctive powers and irreducibly disjunctive powers, then surely too there are irreducibly disjunctive conjunctions as well.

down. For *powers*, one might argue, are dispositions, or potencies, not ‘acts’ or ‘manifestations’; but the role of ‘potency’ is commonly associated with *matter*, whereas the role of ‘act’ is commonly associated with form. Addressing this concern in detail would take us too far afield; but let me offer just two brief remarks. First, Aristotle himself distinguishes between *active* (causal) power and mere potentiality, and it is the latter, not the former, that is associated with the matter role.<sup>14</sup> This makes intuitive sense, too. *Being feline*, for example, might just be a certain complex power or capacity to develop and behave in certain ways, even if, at the same time, *felinity* is the actualization of the potentiality on the part of some matter for being a cat. Second, the metaphysic of properties with which I am working in this paper is a version of *dispositional monism*, according to which *all* properties (and hence all *manifestations of dispositions*) are powers, and therefore dispositions. There are, of course, well-known difficulties for dispositional monism, not least of which are the threat of infinite regress and the (related) problem of ungrounded dispositions. I cannot possibly hope to articulate and defend my own responses to these problems here; but I can at least refer interested readers to promising responses already available in the literature.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. NATURES AS UNITING OTHER POWERS

Thesis T4 is meant to express and do justice to that part of traditional hylomorphism that says that natures are principles of unity. The relation of *uniting* is to be understood roughly as follows: one power—a nature—unites some other powers just in the case that the nature is so connected to the other powers that its manifestation depends upon the cooperative manifestation of the united powers and, furthermore, the latter do not confer any powers on the object that has

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<sup>14</sup> Witt 2003, esp. Ch. 2.

<sup>15</sup> See Molnar 2003 and Bird 2007

the nature that are both intrinsic to the object and independent of the nature. A bit more precisely:

A power  $p_0$  of an object  $x$  unites distinct powers  $p_1 - p_n =_{df}$  (i)  $p_0$  is intrinsic to  $x$ ,<sup>16</sup> (ii) each of  $p_1 - p_n$  is a nature of at least one of  $x$ 's parts, (iii)  $p_0$  is grounded in or identical to a certain sort of cooperative manifestation (CM) of  $p_1 - p_n$ ,<sup>17</sup> (iv) every power intrinsic to  $x$  that is at least partly grounded in CM is identical with, reducible to, or at least partly grounded in  $p_0$ , and (v) there is no power intrinsic to  $x$  that is distinct from both  $p_0$  and CM and that grounds  $p_0$ .

Consider a human organism, for example, and suppose that *humanity* is indeed a biological nature. The manifestation of humanity in a region depends causally upon the cooperative manifestation of the natures of the simple parts of the human organism. Not just any sort of cooperative manifestation will do, however. Take all of the simple parts of a human and force-fit them into a one-quart cylindrical container and you will not have a human organism, even if, at that time, the natures of the erstwhile parts of the human being are engaged in some sort of cooperative manifestation. Thus, the presence of humanity in a region depends upon a particular *sort* of cooperative manifestation of the natures of the relevant parts. (Perhaps it just *is* that sort of cooperative activity. I don't commit to this; but neither do I intend to rule it out.) Finally, every power intrinsic to a human being whose manifestation depends upon the relevant sort of cooperative activity—e.g., the capacity for rational thought, the power to grow and develop as a human organism, the power to run and dance—is plausibly dependent upon the

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<sup>16</sup> This might be a problem if, as some think, dispositions—and therefore powers—turn out to be extrinsic. Jennifer McKittrick (2003), for example, argues for the thesis that dispositions are extrinsic. Molnar (2003), on the other hand argues that they are intrinsic, and Bird (2007) provides replies to McKittrick's arguments. Obviously I'm taking sides with Molnar and Bird.

<sup>17</sup> In other words: Let CM be a property such that, necessarily, CM is had by an object  $x$  iff  $p_1 - p_n$  manifest in a particular sort of way. Then  $x$ 's having  $p_0$  is grounded in or identical to  $x$ 's having CM.

power that is humanity; and humanity is not itself so dependent upon some further uniting power.<sup>18</sup> Thus, humanity unites the natures of the parts of a human being in the sense described above. This is the sense in which I think that humanity is a ‘principle of unity’, and it is part of what is involved in its being a nature.

At this juncture, it may be helpful briefly to contrast my own understanding of principles of unity with another one available in the literature. Mark Johnston, in developing his own version ofhylomorphism, also regards forms as principles of unity; and he regards principles of unity as relations. Thus, for example, he writes:

Consider HCl, a kind of molecule. The principle of unity for individual hydrogen chloride (HCl) molecules is the relation of *bipolar bonding*. ... The principle of unity holds of the ions, and its holding is the essential condition for existence of the molecule. It is simply an essentialist elaboration of a proposition of chemistry that what it is for a given hydrogen chloride molecule to be is for there to be a hydrogen ion and a chlorine ion together in a bipolar bond. (2006: 653)

On the assumption that relations can be identified with polyadic properties and properties with causal powers (both controversial, of course) Johnston’s version ofhylomorphism comes out in one respect very similar to my own: principles of unity, and so the forms of material objects, turn out to be powers. But it should also be clear that, on my view, relations like *bipolar bonding* will not at all be the right sorts of powers to function as *natures*. To see why, one need only attend to the fact that HCl and NaCl both have their parts united (in Johnston’s sense) by the bipolar bonding relation, and yet they don’t share a nature. As I see it, a nature should be something that *unites the powers* of the parts of the object in the sense described above. But it is

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<sup>18</sup> I don’t, of course, mean to suggest that these powers are *unique* to human beings; only that they are intrinsic.

hard to see *bipolar bonding* as playing that role. HCl and NaCl have very different causal powers, after all; thus, even if *bipolar bonding* satisfied conditions (i - iv) of the definition of power-uniting, it is hard to imagine that it would satisfy condition (v). Presumably condition (v) is satisfied in each case by a more ‘all-encompassing’ power—i.e., a power that we would normally name by reference to a kind, like *being hydrogen chloride*, or *being sodium chloride*.

#### 4. NATURES, ‘INDIVIDUATORS’, AND ‘DISTINGUISHING PROPERTIES’

According to the version of hylomorphism that I am developing, the natures of material objects play the role of form, and they enter into compounds with things or stuffs that play the role of matter. On one common way of understanding the roles of form and matter, forms are constituents that are shared among objects of the same kind, whereas matter is what individuates objects of a kind. I can unqualifiedly endorse the claim about forms, but not the claim about matter. In accord with the spirit of that claim, I want to say that (for material objects, anyway) what natures enter into compounds with are *individuator*s. But for those of us who endorse the view that *distinct objects* might nevertheless share the *same matter* in common, and for those of us who believe that immaterial things might have a hylomorphic structure, the claim that ‘matter is what individuates objects of a kind’ cannot be affirmed without qualification. Individuators can’t be seen as accounting for distinctness, since distinct items can have the same individuator as a constituent. Furthermore, *matter* can’t always be what individuates, since immaterial things have no matter, strictly speaking. (Another way of putting this: It is not always matter, literally speaking, that plays the matter-role.) Let me therefore say a few words about how I’m thinking about individuators, about matter-sharing, and about the hylomorphic structure of immaterial things.

Let us begin by considering simple material objects. A simple material thing—a point-sized particle, for example—will have a nature which it shares with other particles of the same kind. But what accounts for the fact that there are *many* particles with the same nature rather than just *one* scattered, mereologically complex particle located wherever we find the nature in question? The answer, I take it, is just this: The nature itself doesn't divide across disconnected regions of spacetime; it is a power that must be, in some sense wholly or fully concentrated at, or attached to, point-sized regions (or, better, line-sized ones for the typical case of a *moving*, spatially-point-sized particle) rather than to scattered regions. In light of this, it is natural to suppose that, in the case of each particle of the relevant kind, the nature has compounded with some further constituent that accounts for its concentration at or attachment to the region in question. From here, the story might be fleshed out in a variety of different ways. My own inclination is to think that, for simple objects, the individuators are regions—presumably point-sized, but perhaps not—of spacetime. I think of the powers of simple material objects as physically locatable properties—qualities that exist at multiple regions of spacetime. Thus, it is natural to regard the objects themselves as compounds whose matter is a spacetime region and whose form is the quality located at that region.

What about complex material things? Here, it seems, we have fundamentally the same situation, but on a larger scale. What is it that accounts for the fact that there are many distinct human beings rather than just one spatiotemporally scattered human being? Presumably it is that human nature doesn't divide widely across spacetime; it is the sort of power that is fully and completely located in what we think of as human-shaped regions.<sup>19</sup> More precisely: it is a

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<sup>19</sup> But, one might wonder, *how* is it located at those regions? For some such region R, does the nature *entend*, *pertend*, or *span* the region? (Roughly, this question boils down to the following: “Is the nature wholly present at every subregion of the region in question, or does it have parts at every subregion, or neither?” For definitions of *entension*, *pretension*, and *spanning*, and related notions see Hudson 2005: 99 – 101. See also Parsons 2007.

power that *unites* only the natures of certain kinds of objects standing in certain kinds of relations, and it is this fact that explains why human nature concentrates at human-shaped regions rather than scattered regions. Unlike the case of simple particles, however, it is *not* so natural to suppose that the individuating constituent of a human being is its region of spacetime. The reason is just that there is an intuitively better candidate available—namely, the collection of objects whose powers are united by the nature. (By using the terms ‘a better candidate’ and ‘the collection of objects’, I don’t mean to commit to the claim that ‘the collection’ is an individual thing distinct from the human being it constitutes.) Thus, in general, the individuators for mereologically complex things will just be collections of objects whose powers are united by the natures of those things.

But what if we believe that distinct things share all of the same matter in common? Suppose, for example, you think that a clay statue is distinct from the lump of clay that constitutes it. (Perhaps you think that the lump can survive things—squashing and reshaping, for instance—that the statue cannot, and that by virtue of this difference, the lump cannot be identical to the statue.) In that case, it will be at least somewhat misleading to say that matter individuates. Matter would *not* be what accounts for the distinctness of the two objects. Nevertheless, if you also believe—as I do—in a relation of *numerical sameness without identity*, you might think that there is still a perfectly good sense in which matter *does* individuate. Proponents of numerical sameness without identity say that, in the statue/lump case, though the statue and the lump are distinct, they nevertheless count as *one material object*. They are *two* hylomorphic compounds, two things, two entities, etc.; but they are, nevertheless, one material object. Thus, on this view, *material objects* are individuated by their matter. That is, whether *x* and *y* count as the *same material object* just depends on whether they share the same matter. I

have defended this view elsewhere and do not have the space to rehearse that defense here. But what I want to note is just this: If one has this sort of view, the right thing to say about individuators is *not* that they account for *distinctness simpliciter*, but rather that they account for *absence of numerical sameness*. In the case of material objects, matter plays that role. (What, then, accounts for distinctness simpliciter? Perhaps divergence of properties.)

We have considered simple material things and complex material things. But there is one further sort of case we must consider given our present interest in the trinity and the incarnation. What should we say about simple *immaterial* things?

The nature of a simple immaterial thing will not be located anywhere in spacetime, so there is no literal sense in which matter could individuate such things. One option then is simply to deny that immaterial things have a hylomorphic structure. If we say this, then we can go on to say one of the following three things: that they have matter but no nature, that they have neither matter nor nature, or that they are identical to their natures. Affirming the first option would be extremely bizarre if what motivates us to deny that immaterial things have a hylomorphic structure is the fact that they have no literal matter. Taking the second option commits us to the view that some substances have natures, but not all of them do. It is hard to see what the motivation for such a view might be. Thus, it seems that the last alternative would be the clear choice.

But suppose we believe in immaterial things that *share* a nature? We cannot appeal to matter or spatiotemporal separation or anything of the sort to individuate them—i.e., to account for an absence of numerical sameness among them. Thus, a natural thing to say, given that we already accept a relation of numerical sameness without identity, is to say that immaterial things that share a nature are, on that account, one in number, and they are distinguished from one

another by their possession of some further property—let us call it, uncreatively, a *distinguishing property*.

Note, however, that on this view there is a clear sense in which the nature of an immaterial thing does, or can, *play the role of matter*. Just as matter-sharing explains numerical sameness among distinct material-objects, so too nature-sharing explains numerical sameness among distinct immaterial objects. Likewise, the property (perhaps complex or conjunctive, or perhaps a mere thisness) that accounts for the distinctness of these objects plays at least part of the role of form. Differences in form account for major differences in character among material objects; and, in the case of two distinct things that count as the same material object, it will be differences in form that fundamentally account for the distinctness of those things. And so too in the case of the distinguishing properties of immaterial things that share a nature in common. Thus, it turns out that immaterial objects have a hylomorphic structure after all.

## 5. FURTHER TERMINOLOGY

Having now finished commenting on theses T1 – T5, I want to close my discussion of hylomorphism as such by explaining (in light of the foregoing) my use of terms like *constituent*, *matter-form compound*, *matter*, and *form*:

$x$  is a constituent of  $y$  =<sub>df</sub>  $x$  plays in  $y$  the role of matter or the role of form.

$x$  is a matter-form compound =<sub>df</sub>  $x$  has constituents that play the roles of matter and form

$m$  plays the role of matter in  $x =_{df}$  (i)  $m$  is an individuator that exactly overlaps  $x$  or, if there is no such individuator,  $m$  is a nature of  $x$  and (ii) it is not possible for a distinct thing to share  $m$  with  $x$  without being numerically the same as  $x$

$f$  plays the role of *form* in  $x$  iff  $f$  is a nature of  $x$  (or a sum of natures of  $x$ , in the case of multi-natured beings), or a distinguishing property instantiated by  $x$ , and  $f$  does not play the role of matter in  $x$ .<sup>20</sup>

As noted earlier, I allow that mere pluralities—collections—can function as individuators, and hence can play the role of matter. But, in light of the above definitions, this poses a small terminological problem. Consider the collection of particles,  $C$ , that plays the role of matter in some particular cat. Suppose the  $x$ s are the members of the collection. Given that  $C$  is a mere collection, ‘ $C$ ’ is just a device for referring collectively to the  $x$ s. Thus, the  $x$ s play the role of matter. But now do we say that the  $x$ s are *constituents* of the cat? If we do, the definitions imply (falsely) that *each* of the  $x$ s plays the role of matter in the cat. If we don’t—if we say, instead, that the  $x$ s are *a constituent* of  $y$ —then we violate grammar. There is no substantive issue here. We just need to recognize that, just as ‘the collection’ is only apparently a singular referring expression, so too ‘being a constituent of the cat’ only apparently picks out a role that can be played just by an individual. (Analogously: We can’t grammatically say that the members of the Notre Dame football team are *the winner* of Saturday’s game. We have to say either that the team itself was the winner or that the members of the team won. The problem in the case of

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<sup>20</sup> In the case of multi-natured beings, I say that the two natures (or more) comprise *one* form because, as indicated above, different forms account for the distinctness of objects that share the same matter in common. Thus, if Christ’s two natures were two forms that inform the same matter, then there would be no way to account for the fact

constituency is just that there is no corresponding verb analogous to ‘won’. We could invent one; but once the point here has been appreciated, there is no need to.)

There is one additional notion that ought to be introduced here as well: the notion of *consubstantiality*. It is important to talk about consubstantiality because, according to the tradition, Jesus is supposed to be *consubstantial with the Father* with regard to his divinity and *consubstantial with us* as regards his humanity. It is generally taken for granted that the *substance* or *essence* of a thing is its nature, and that what it is for objects (material or immaterial) to be consubstantial is for them to share a nature. I affirm all of this. Given what I have said above, distinct but consubstantial immaterial things will stand in the relation of numerical sameness without identity—they will be counted as *one* F, where F specifies the nature they share in common.<sup>21</sup> But consubstantial *material* things will not stand in that relation: matter-sharing (in general), not nature-sharing (in general) is what puts things into the relation of numerical sameness without identity.

Since God is an immaterial thing, it will follow from all of this that *x* is the same God as *y* if and only if *x* and *y* share a divine nature (and there will be exactly one God if and only if there is exactly one divine nature, as traditional Christian doctrine maintains). Obviously we are now in a position to say something about the metaphysics of the trinity.

## 6. THE TRINITY

So let me provide a brief sketch of the “constitution model” of the Trinity that I favor. In

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that Christ is a *two-natured person* who is distinct both from the compound of his matter plus the human nature and the compound of his matter plus the divine nature.

<sup>21</sup> This, of course, implies that if (say) angels are immaterial and share a common nature, then all angels are the same angel, even if they are distinguishable under some other sortal. One way to avoid this consequence is to suppose that ‘angel’ isn’t a natural kind, and that each of the beings we characterize as angels in fact has its own distinct nature. Another possibility is to deny that angels are immaterial. But if these options are somehow untenable, I am content to accept the consequence.

several other papers (Brower 2004a and 2004b; Rea 2003, 2006, and 2007; Brower & Rea 2005) Jeff Brower and I have tried to motivate this model by highlighting its intrinsic virtues, defending it against objections, subjecting its main rivals to criticism, and arguing that the view is at least consistent with and in salient respects similar to views defended by some of the most important patristic and medieval figures writing on the Trinity. For present purposes, however, I'll leave all of that aside and simply present the main lines of the model.

According to the model I favor—"Constitution Trinitarianism"—each divine person is an immaterial substance whose constituents are the divine nature (or substance) and a "person-making" property (let's refer to the relevant properties as *Fatherhood*, *Sonship*, and *Procession*). The divine nature plays the role of matter, and the person-making properties each play the role of form in the senses just described. Since each divine person is *a* substance, the persons cannot be regarded as mere aspects of a common substance, and so the heresy of modalism is avoided. Moreover, though the persons are distinct from one another, they nevertheless count as *one God* and as numerically the same divine substance, and so the heresy of tri-theism is avoided. This, again, is because immaterial things are individuated by their nature, and Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share the same divine nature. The relation between the persons of the trinity is, therefore, *analogous* to the relation of material constitution—the relation between objects that share all of the same matter at the same time. Thus, on this view, there is just one divine substance, and so the view allows us to affirm, along with the creed, that there is "...one God, the Father almighty...and...one Lord Jesus Christ...begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father...".

Elsewhere I have said this about the model:

What is it that plays the role of matter in the Trinity? And is it a substance itself? Here I want to offer only a *partial* view that might be developed in a variety of different ways. What plays the role of matter in the Trinity is *the divine nature*; and the divine nature *is* a substance. It is not a fourth substance, for reasons already discussed; nor is it a fourth person (since it is not a compound of ‘matter’ plus a person-defining-property). But it is a substance, since (again, taking cues from Aristotle) *natures* are substances. What I don’t want to take a position on here is the question of what, exactly, a nature is. Is it concrete or abstract? Is it particular or universal? Is it a property or something else? These questions I will not answer. I think that they must be answered in a way that allows the divine persons to be concrete particular non-properties; but I think that there are various ways of answering these questions that are compatible with that view. (Rea 2007: 420)

In the present paper, obviously enough, I am not leaving all of these questions open. I have come down in favor of the view that natures are powers. I have not said whether natures are universals or particulars—I have said that they are sharable and multiply locatable, but nothing beyond that. This might suggest that natures are universals; but I don’t want to commit to this, partly because I am unsure whether I buy into the universal/particular distinction.<sup>22</sup>

## 7. THE INCARNATION

I turn now, at last, to the metaphysics of the incarnation. Recall our central question: How are the elements involved in the incarnation—the divine nature, the human nature, the body and human soul of Jesus, the man Jesus, and the Son of God—related to one another? I’ll begin

with some abbreviations that I think will make the presentation of the model go more smoothly; then I'll lay out the model.

Here are the abbreviations:

'X++Y' abbreviates 'the matter-form compound whose matter is X and whose form is Y'

M = Jesus' physical matter

DN = the divine nature

S = The Son

Sonship = the person-making property in the compound that is the Son

HN = humanity—Christ's (and our) human nature

Now for the model.

As should already be clear, I do not identify the human nature of Jesus (as some do) with either his body, or his soul, or the mereological sum of his body and soul. The human nature of Jesus is a power, and it is something that he is supposed to *share* with us. On the present view, then, humanity—HN—is one of two *formal* constituents of Jesus (the other being DN), and Jesus himself is a compound of those formal constituents and a material constituent—M. One might wish to identify M with Jesus' body; or one might wish to identify Jesus' body with the compound, M++HN. Which alternative one chooses depends in part upon what one says about Jesus' soul.

What should one say about Jesus' human soul? At the very least, I want to say that, for all  $x$ ,  $x$  has a human soul iff  $x$  is identical to a matter-form compound whose form is a human nature. But it is not clear to me what more to say. I am reluctant to take on commitments because I suspect that with minor modifications here and there, my model is indifferent between

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<sup>22</sup>On this issue, see Ramsey 1925 and MacBride 2005.

a variety of options (including an option according to which ‘having a soul’ doesn’t imply the existence of anything that would ordinarily count as a soul). That said, though, here is an option that I mostly like: A human soul is something with two modes of existence—material and immaterial. In the immaterial mode, the soul is a compound whose matter is the human nature and whose form is some distinguishing property—perhaps a thisness. In the material mode, the human nature plays the role of form in a compound whose constituents are humanity and some matter, and the (same) distinguishing property becomes simply a property of the whole compound.

One likely consequence of this view is that Jesus’ human soul is identical to the compound that was the Son prior to the incarnation. The reason this is a likely consequence is that there is no candidate other than Sonship in the incarnate Jesus for being the relevant ‘distinguishing property’. Thus, on this view about human souls, what happens in the incarnation is that the compound that *was* the Son becomes the human soul of Jesus. Since this view is consistent with—indeed, entails—that the incarnate Christ has a human soul, there is nothing obviously heretical about it. And I find it intuitively rather satisfying as an account of what the incarnation fundamentally involves.

A consequence of this view that I strongly *dislike*, however, is that all human souls that exist in the immaterial mode count as *the same human being*.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, views in the neighborhood of this pervade the patristic and medieval literature on original sin; so perhaps it deserves to be taken seriously. At any rate, the consequence is mitigated by the fact that God can easily see to it that no human being ever exists in that immaterial state by seeing to it that the relevant distinguishing property is only ever exemplified by a genuine matter-form compound. (This might be part of why resurrection is so important.)

Leaving aside concerns about the nature of the soul, what should we say about the relations between Jesus, the Son, and the two natures of Jesus? On the present model, Jesus is identical to the Son; and prior to the incarnation, the Son is identical to the matter-form compound whose constituents are the divine nature and the person-making property, Sonship. After the incarnation, the Son is identical to a matter-form compound with the following features: (i) his matter is M, (ii) his form comprises *two natures*, DN and HN, and (iii) he has the individuating property, Sonship.

One might worry that this view implies the following claim, which appears at first glance to be incoherent:

$$(C1) \quad S = DN++\text{Sonship} = M++(\text{DN}\&\text{HN})$$

One might also worry that Sonship seems simply to disappear in the incarnation. To the latter worry, I reply that Sonship doesn't disappear; it simply ceases to be a constituent. Prior to the incarnation, Sonship is the formal constituent of S; after the incarnation, it is merely a property of S. To the former worry, I reply that the claim is implied, but it is not incoherent. If '++' represented mereological summation (understood according to standard axioms of mereology), then the claim *would* be incoherent, since standard mereology includes an extensionality axiom. But there is no reason to think that hylomorphic compounding obeys the same rules as mereological summation. Compounds are not defined by their constituents—or, at any rate, to say that they are is to *add* a substantive and controversial thesis to one's hylomorphic theory.

One might also worry that C1 violates Leibniz's Law. After all, DN++Sonship has the property *having DN* as matter whereas M++(DN&HN) lacks that property. I reply that the "problem" here is to be solved in whatever way we solve ordinary problems with material change. Let  $M_F$  be the eight-pound lump of matter that is Fred's matter when he is newborn.

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<sup>23</sup> Or, at any rate, the same *something*, if being human requires having a body.

Now, *Newborn Fred* has the property *having  $M_F$  as matter*; *Adult Fred* lacks that property. But, as is well known, we can solve the problem by indexing either the property or the having of it.<sup>24</sup>

One might furthermore worry that, post-incarnation, the Son is no longer the *same God* as the Father, since Father and Son no longer share the same matter: the Son has M for matter whereas the Father has DN. I reply that, because the compound DN++Sonship is present in Jesus—because Jesus still has as a constituent the very thing that plays the role of matter in the Father—that is sufficient for Jesus still to stand in the immaterial analog of the matter-sharing relation with the Father. (And likewise for the Spirit.) Thus, the doctrine of the Trinity is preserved. Moreover, because HN is present in Jesus, he shares a nature with us and so counts as human; and because Jesus exemplifies Sonship, he counts as the Son incarnate.

Lastly, one might object that the official story about the incarnate Christ is not consistent with what I am inclined to say about ordinary cases of material constitution. Consider, for example, a block of marble ('B') that constitutes both a statue ('X') and a pillar ('Y'). Since the pillar could survive erosion that would destroy the statue, X and Y are distinct. Thus, it looks like we have two matter-form compounds that share the same matter. So far so good. But now let F1 be the 'statue form' and let F2 be the 'pillar form'. Given what I say about the incarnation, it seems that I ought to be willing to say that, in the region occupied by the statue, there is a two-natured object—a statue-pillar, perhaps—whose matter is B and whose two natures are F1 and F2. In other words, I ought to say that there is a thing S\* such that S\* = B++(F1&F2). But it looks as if I do not say this—I say, instead, simply that X and Y stand in

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<sup>24</sup> For discussion, see (e.g.) Rea 1998. There are other ways of solving the problem in Fred's case, too: invoke temporal parts, appeal to presentism, or (following a recent suggestion of Jeffrey Brower [forthcoming]) account for the change by positing different compounds (i.e., *Newborn Fred* and *Adult Fred*) which have different properties but have Fred himself as a common constituent. Each of these strategies, however, seem problematic as applied to the incarnation.

the relation of numerical sameness without identity. So, one might think, I am not giving uniform treatment to similar cases.

There are two ways to reply. One is to take two-natured beings to be metaphysically rare and special, and to insist that (unlike in the case of the incarnation) in the case of X and Y, there is simply no reason to believe that there is a third thing, S\*, that has two natures and stands in the relation of numerical sameness without identity with them. The view, then, would be that sometimes when two natures inform the same matter, a two-natured being results, but most of the time that doesn't happen. One would then appeal to divine revelation (i.e., the Christian scriptures and the arguments that move from them to the doctrine of the incarnation) as our reason for thinking that the incarnation is one of the special cases where a two-natured being results.

Alternatively, one might say that two-natured beings aren't all that special after all—that, e.g., when a statue and a pillar coincide, what we have is a statue, a pillar, and a statue-pillar, all of which are the *same material object*, and likewise for other cases of material constitution. One might then also concede that, in the incarnation too, there are three compounds—M++DN, M++HN, and M++(DN&HN)—all of which coincide, all of which count as the *same material object* (and perhaps the same F for a variety of other Fs) but only one of which counts as a person.<sup>25</sup> Overall, this second reply strikes me as more natural and more easily motivated for a believer in numerical sameness without identity, so I am inclined to favor it. But those who dislike the almost indiscriminate proliferation of multi-natured beings might prefer the first reply instead.

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<sup>25</sup> Note that, on this view, DN and HN do not together compose a third, hybrid nature; rather, M++(DN&HN) is to be understood as a genuinely two-natured being. Note too that belief in multiple hylomorphic compounds—or even belief in many multi-natured beings—in the incarnate Christ poses no problem for orthodoxy. What matters for orthodoxy is that there is *one person* in the incarnate Christ, and that *that person* has exactly two natures.

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