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THE FREE WILL OF A SINLESS INCARNATE GOD

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ABSTRACT: The paper considers and rejects three possible ways of resolving the apparent incompatibility of Christ being sinless with him having a human nature. These possible solutions are that (1) it is only a contingent truth that Christ did not sin, (2) some moral compatibilist view of free will is true, and (3) Christ' s free will was merely a free will to choose whether or not to do a supererogatory good action. It accepts possible solution (4), that, although Christ was necessarily sinless, he felt what normal humans feel when tempted. The paper considers and rejects three possible objections to this solution that (1) one cannot be tempted to do what one cannot do, (2) Christ would not have had the kind of free will that all other humans have in virtue of their human nature, (3) it rules out an objective theory of the Atonement. But it is sympathetic to an objection (4), that this solution requires that Christ sometimes believed (falsely) that he was able to yield to temptation. This extra requirement is contrary to the normal (but not essential) Christian view that (in his human nature) he always believed himself to be God.

KEYWORDS: Christ; Christology; human nature; Bartel; Pawl

The Problem of the Compatibility of Divine and Human Wills

That God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, became human and lived on earth for some 30 years, approximately 2000 years ago, is the official doctrine of almost all "churches" which call themselves "Christian". But just what God becoming human consists in was the subject of intense discussion in the early centuries AD and has remained so to a limited extent in mediaeval and modern times. The Catholic and Orthodox "churches" are officially committed to the definition by the Council of Chalcedon in 451CE, of what this consists in; and so are – in effect, though not always explicitly – many Protestant "churches", This Council is recognised by Roman Catholics and Orthodox as the fourth Ecumenical Council, and both these "churches" (whose members constitute the majority of humans who call themselves "Christians")

regard the doctrinal definitions of Ecumenical Councils as doctrines essential to Christianity. The Council of Chalcedon affirmed that "one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, was:

> perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly human, of a rational soul and a body; consubstantial with the Father as regards his divinity, and the same consubstantial with us as regards his humanity; like us in all respects except for sin; begotten before the ages from the Father as regards his divinity, and the same consubstantial with us as regards his humanity; like us in all respects except for sin; begotten before the ages from the Father as regards his divinity, and in the last days the same for us and for our salvation from Mary, the virgin God-bearer, as regards his humanity; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, and acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation; at no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union, but rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person and a single subsistent being; he is not parted or divided into two persons, but is one and the same only-begotten Son, God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ, just as the prophets taught from the beginning. (Tanner, 1990, p. 86)[1]

In the course of his very full discussion of the understanding of "nature" and its relation to "substance" and other metaphysical terms in the conciliar texts, Pawl (2016, pp. 34-42) plausibly argues that the "human nature" of Christ is understood in the Conciliar texts as a concrete nature, that is an individual instance of the abstract nature of being human (which belongs to all humans) .

But what is it to have a body, and a "rational" soul? The council clearly intended "have a body" to mean "have a body similar to the bodies that ordinary humans have". Our usage of the English word "human", and of the Greek and Latin words so translated, seems to be such that it is not possible to provide necessary conditions for the respects in which bodies have to be similar to those of ordinary humans to count as human bodies. It is unclear for example whether embodied persons with similar capacities to ourselves, living on another planet, having no genetic connection with us, count as having a human body. But clearly it is sufficient for some person to have a human body, that they have (or its would have after normal development from a foetus) a body similar in its capacities to persons, normally called "humans" ,through which they act and perceive their surroundings, and belong by descent to the human race now living on earth. Speakers would be even less in agreement about what are the necessary conditions for a soul to be "rational". But again, clearly it is sufficient for some person to have a rational soul that they have (or would have after normal development), some minimal awareness of moral right and wrong, powers of reasoning, most of the five senses, feelings of pain and pleasure, and reactions to

[1] I have replaced Tanner's "man" by "human", as the more accurate translation, given the current English usage of these words.

stimuli characteristic of those normally called "humans". I summarise this as a "human way of thinking and acting." The "nature" of a conscious being is, as I understand it, their particular way of thinking and acting. So clearly by these criteria Jesus Christ had a human nature.

Timothy Bartel (1991) considers this interpretation of the two-nature doctrine, as the principle, which he calls "CE", that "The one person Jesus Christ has all of the essential properties of the kind divinity and all of the essential properties of the kind humanity"; and so all the necessary and sufficient properties of that kind. Bartel cast considerable doubt on whether the Fathers of the Council of Chalcedon had the concept of human nature as having all the properties essential, and so jointly necessary and sufficient, in a modern sense of "essential" which he characterises as "metaphysical necessity" or "necessity in the broadly logical sense". By this he understands the sense in which "Kripke, Putnam, Plantinga, and many other modern philosophers" would understand it.

Such "metaphysical necessity" is often supposed to be wider in scope than mere "logical necessity". In my view, the Fathers had the concept of logical necessity – that a proposition is logically necessary iff (= if and only if) its negation entails a contradiction. It follows from this that a conjunction of properties constitutes all the properties essential to human nature iff it entails a contradiction to suppose that a person having that that conjunction of properties is not human. Hence it is sufficient for a person to have a human nature, that they have bodies similar in their capacities to ours, are by descent members of the human race, and have the capacities for thinking and acting which I described.

Bartel, however, is prepared to concede that just possibly, the Fathers might have had this concept of human nature, but considers that a much more serious objection is that they "certainly could not have anticipated our currently fashionable epistemology of this kind of necessity, and therefore they could not have self-consciously chosen [CE] in preference to some weaker alternative". This alternative is that the essence of some substance is not determined a priori by whether or not it has some conjunction of superficial properties, but by the underlying properties which cause the superficial properties. Thus, "we might have initially picked out the kind *gold* by identifying its samples in terms of colour, malleability, specific gravity, solubility in *aqua regia*, and other superficial properties of the sample." But we now identify gold as any substance formed of molecules consisting of atoms having exactly 79 protons in their nucleus. Hence, on this view, the discovery of the essences of natural kinds is at least partially an a posteriori affair". Likewise, Bartel points out, "many philosophers would be quite willing to apply this epistemology of natural kinds to our own species. If they are right, then the concept of human nature is revisable as well – it cannot be captured for all time in a formula which we can know purely a priori".

My answer to this powerful objection, is that for different purposes and different kinds of substance and property, we have different kinds of concepts of what their essence consists in. It is important for some purposes, especially in the physical sciences, to have a concept which individuates kinds of chemical substance by their atomic composition. This is because what they do and what happens to them (with which other substances they will combine, at what temperature they will melt or boil,

and so on) depends on their atomic composition, and not on their superficial properties. But there are other purposes and kinds of substance and property, such that what they do and what happens to them, does depend on their superficial properties. What humans do intentionally and often also what happens to them, depends on how they exercise their beliefs and desires in different circumstances. Beliefs and desires are superficial properties; and we know from our own experience what a belief and a desire are. Hence for the purposes of the social sciences and for every day interaction with each other, we need the concept of the essence of a human, which depends solely on superficial properties. Humans are to be distinguished from the higher animals mainly by having a human way of thinking and acting. It follows that even if scientists discover that some primate who is an ancestor of present-day human persons had virtually the same genetic constitution as ourselves, those persons would not be human unless they had a human way of thinking and acting – which, I believe, they do not have; chimpanzees do not have moral beliefs and cannot distinguish between deductive and inductive inferences. This concept of being human is discoverable a priori, and does not depend on a posteriori scientific investigation. And for theological purposes, it is essential to use that concept, since on a Christian view it is by what we do in virtue of our beliefs and desires, that we are judged by God. Hence, I believe that the Fathers were right to assume that to have a human nature it is sufficient to have a body similar to those of persons normally called "humans", belonging by descent to the human race, and a way of thinking and acting, similar to that of such persons.

The Christian theological tradition normally (but not invariably) claims that this human way of thinking and acting includes humans making choices "of their own free will", in a sense that makes them morally responsible. I understand a person being "morally responsible" for their actions ,that they are morally guilty (and so blameworthy) for doing wrong (=sinful) actions, that is, actions which the agent has a moral obligation not to do; and morally meritorious (and so praiseworthy) for doing supererogatory good actions, in the sense of morally good actions which the agent has no obligation to do, or morally obligatory actions which are very difficult for that person to do. Here and subsequently , I shall assume by a "morally" good or obligatory action, one which the agent believes to be morally good or obligatory in an objective sense, since we can acquire guilt and merit only for acting or not acting on what we believe. (I include here and subsequently as "actions", actions of intentionally not doing some action; and so persons are morally guilty for intentionally not doing some action, which they believe they have a moral obligation to do.) It is, I suggest, very important for Christian theology to make this claim, since it claims that God punishes those who choose to do morally wrong acts; and it would surely be unjust of God to punish humans for making choices for which they are not morally responsible because they do not have "free will" in some sense which makes them morally responsible. (I shall come shortly to the question of in what sense of "free will", Christian theology can justifiably make the claim that free will is necessary for moral responsibility.) While the doctrine that Christ has "free will" has not been declared as essential for Christian doctrine, by any Ecumenical council, Christian tradition has normally taken it for granted that Christ has free will. (See Pawl, 2019, pp. 121 – 122. for many

examples of non-Ecumenical councils and prominent theologians who have asserted this.)

It was Freud above all who helped us to see how a person can have two systems of belief and action, to some extent independent of each other. In a Freudian situation when the person acts on one system, she is not influenced by a desire, and refuses to acknowledge to herself a belief, when these are held only in the other system, and conversely. Freud's account of divided minds was, of course, derived from his analysis of cases of human self-deception, where the self-deception is a pathetic state from which the individual needs to be rescued. But the Freudian account of such cases, helps us to see the logical possibility of some person for good reason keeping one belief and desire system separate from his other belief and desire system, and simultaneously doing different actions guided by different sets of beliefs and desires.

So what, thus understood, Chalcedon is telling us, is that the one incarnate Son has simultaneously both a conjunction of properties sufficient for being divine, and also a conjunction of properties sufficient for being human, and acts simultaneously in accordance with both at the same time – exercising his divine properties in guiding the universe, and exercising his human properties in guiding his human body. I assume that it is sufficient, as well as necessary, for a person to have a divine nature, that that person is essentially omnipotent (and so creator of us and of the universe), omniscient, and perfectly good. So is it compatible with having a divine nature that a person could also have a human nature of the kind which I described earlier? I cannot see that God's omnipotence and omniscience, are as such, incompatible with having a human nature. God, the second person of the Trinity can, at the same time as keeping the universe in existence and controlling the operation of laws of nature, also operate in the light of his human beliefs and desires to do actions through his human body. But humans, on my analysis of human nature, have free will in a sense necessary for moral responsibility. They have essentially the power to do either morally obligatory actions or morally wrong actions ; and they are morally responsible for which they choose to do, and so morally guilty if they choose to do morally wrong actions(=sin) And it looks as if that is where any incompatibility between the natures, if they are incompatible with each other, is to be found. For being essentially perfectly good seems incompatible with essentially having the power to do morally wrong actions. The Third Council of Constantinople, recognised by Roman Catholics and Orthodox as the sixth Ecumenical Council, whose definitions they also regard as doctrines essential to Christianity, made a crucial contribution to discussion of this issue. It was concerned to resolve the controversy of whether, in virtue of having two natures, Christ had two wills. Those who said that he had only one will are called "monothelites" and those who said he had two wills are known as "diothelites". The Council defined diothelitism as the true Christian view:

> We proclaim equally two natural volitions or wills in him… which undergo no division, no change, no partition, no confusion…. and the two natural wills, not in opposition… but his human will following, and not resisting or struggling, rather in fact subject to his divine and all powerful will. For the will of the flesh had to be moved, and yet to be

> subjected to the divine will… For just as his flesh is said to be and is flesh of the Word of God, so too the natural will of his flesh is said to be and does belong to the Word of God, just as he says himself , " I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of the Father who sent me." (Tanner, 1990 p. 128. Citation from John 6:38)

But that leaves the problem that if his human will is subject to the divine will, then, since the divine will can only will what is morally good, it might seem that Christ cannot have the free will which humans have in virtue of their nature, of being sometimes able to do what is morally wrong. Pawl (2019,129) rightly claims that "the councils are not explicit on what amount of control the divine will employs over the human will. There are multiple interpretations one could give, and not all of them require the complete docility of the human will." But the crucial issue is whether the divine will *always* prevents the human will from willing what is wrong. If so, then it would seem that Christ does not have one essential property of humans; if not, then Christ could do what is morally wrong. I suggest that what the third Council was claiming is best expressed without hypostasising "wills". It is persons who initiate actions, not wills. Then having a divine will, is willing in the light of one's system of divine beliefs and desires; and having a human will is willing in the light of one's system of human beliefs and desires. What the Council is claiming is that when Christ wills to do some action in the light of his human beliefs and desires, he is inevitably limited in what he can will by his divine system. Since his divine system includes a desire only and always to do the morally best action and no competing desire, it would then seem that Christ cannot will to do any morally wrong action (=sin). But Christ was tempted, as – according to the Gospels – happened at the beginning of his ministry (Matthew 4:1 – 11; see also parallel passages in Mark and Luke); and – on a natural interpretation of his prayer in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39, and parallel passages in Mark and Luke) – also happened at the end of his ministry. The Gospels claim that he resisted these temptations. The Letter to the Hebrews (4:15) describes Jesus as one who "in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." The Council of Chalcedon (Tanner 86) declared that Christ was "perfect in humanity", and so had a pre- Fall nature, not a fallen nature. But Adam, with a pre - Fall human nature and so presumably a perfect human nature, clearly could sin, because he caused the Fall by his sin. So it would seem to follow that Christ would have the ability to sin.

Apparently Possible Solutions to the Problem

There seem to me to be four apparently possible solutions, four apparently possible ways of avoiding this apparent contradiction, of which – I shall claim – only the fourth is plausible as an account of Christian doctrine. The first possible way is to claim that it is only a contingent truth that Christ did not sin on any occasion when he was tempted. Although this is formally compatible with the declaration of the Third Council of Constantinople and with the Letter to the Hebrews, it is incompatible with other parts of the Christian doctrinal tradition. The letter of Pope Leo which the

Council of Chalcedon attached to their definition, stated that God, "he whom sin *could not* defile" (*nec peccatum contaminare…potuit)* had "taken up our nature and made it his own". (Tanner, p. 77) One non-Ecumenical Council, the Council of Toleto (568 CE) declared "that there *cannot* be a diversity of will ("*non potest voluntas esse diversa*" (Denzinger #572)). Patristic and medieval theologians did not discuss this issue, surely because they assumed that it was necessary that Christ *could not* sin. To suppose that Christ's sinlessness was contingent would make our salvation dependent on Christ freely resisting temptation on every occasion when he was tempted; and so our salvation would have been at risk throughout Christ's earthly life. It would surely have been wrong for God to become incarnate for our salvation in such a way that he might do wrong and thereby disobey his Father, and thereby not achieve our salvation- for the same reason as it is wrong for us frequently to drive a car after having drunk much alcohol, and thereby make it significantly probable that on some occasion we would kill or do serious harm to someone. So the problem being the apparent incompatibility of the two natures becomes the problem of how can it be that Christ suffered the kind of temptation to which we are subject, and yet it not be possible that he should yield to it.

The second possible solution is to adopt some compatibilist theory of free will of a kind, that makes someone morally responsible for their "freely" chosen actions, and so morally guilty for "freely" doing a wrong action, by criteria which are independent of whether they are deterministically caused to do that action by a series of events stretching backwards in time, none of which they themselves cause. There are different versions of moral compatibilism, differing in respect of what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for a person to do some action "freely"; and so to be morally guilty for doing a morally wrong action. A very simple version of those necessary and sufficient conditions is that a person is free to do an action if and only if they are not being consciously "compelled" to do that action, or being physically prevented from doing it. Conscious compulsion to do an action includes being threatened that some human agent would do something very nasty to them or others, if they do not do it; or suffering from some psychiatric disease which makes them feel a very strong urge to do the action. On this view a person would not be morally guilty if they hand over the keys of a safe which they are morally responsible for guarding, to someone who threatens to torture them if they do not do so. And a kleptomaniac would not be morally responsible for stealing. But in both cases, it would be irrelevant whether or not they are caused to do such actions by a deterministic series of causes. Although subsequent compatibilist theories have suggested much more sophisticated conditions for moral responsibility than those conditions, it seems to me for very well-known and much discussed reasons (see for example Swinburne 2013, pp. 214 – 222)) that any form of compatibilism is highly implausible. If someone is deterministically caused to do some morally wrong action by events, none of which they themselves cause, it is not their fault that they are doing some action, and so they are not free not to do it in a sense of having "free will" of a kind that makes them morally responsible for their actions. We exercise free will in intentionally doing some action and so can be morally responsible for doing it, *only if* we are not predetermined to do the action by such a series of causes . A theory of free will, which includes the latter requirement, is known

as a "libertarian" theory of free will; and this is the kind of free will, which – I will assume- is part of human nature, and can be exercised at least sometimes either by doing what is right or doing what is wrong. (It can of course also be exercised in choosing between alternatives which are equally morally good ones.) However, if we were to accept moral compatibilism, as a general solution for all kinds of action done by all kinds of person, that would provide an easy solution to our problem. Before he acquires a human nature, God the Son could predetermine that in his human nature, he never does any wrong action which is "free" by the criteria of some compatibilist theory, for example, unless he is threatened or subject to some psychiatric disease. That would ensure that his human will is always subject to his divine will, while ensuring that he has free will in the sense that other humans have free will.

The third possible solution is one previously advocated by myself (Swinburne (1994) 203-209). I emphasised that someone is morally guilty only if they do a wrong action, that is one which is obligatory not to do. There are however, I argued, innumerable good actions which are not obligatory, but supererogatory; and while someone is praiseworthy for doing a supererogatory good action, they are not blameworthy for failing to do such an action. I argued that, in virtue of his perfect goodness, God could have become incarnate only in a way which predetermined him not to do any morally wrong action. So he would not be morally guilty if he did an action which, although not morally wrong, was not a supererogatory good action. Hence, God might have chosen to become incarnate in such a way that he might in some situation choose of his own free will, not to do some supererogatory good action. Then, although doing the best possible action would always be morally meritorious and praiseworthy, Christ would not necessarily have done anything morally wrong, if he had failed to do that action. This is a form of the solution at which Pawl hinted, that the subjugation of the human will to the divine will might be of a limited extent. Yet in that case, Christ would not have adopted a *fully* human nature, since that involves having the ability to do wrong. Also, yielding to a desire not to do the best possible action, even if it was not obligatory, is naturally described as yielding to a "temptation". Hence, since, most theologians would agree, Christ had no obligation to live a life and suffer a death so good as to provide atonement for our sins and win our salvation, he could have freely chosen not do so. So this solution has the consequence that God could have become incarnate in a way that allowed him to fail to attain its principal objective – provide atonement for our sins, and thereby win our salvation. Although this is not as implausible as the suggestion that he might have become incarnate in a way that allowed him to do what was morally wrong, I do not find it very plausible to suppose that a perfectly good God in becoming incarnate would have risked even that possibility.

I now defend the fourth possible solution, offered by various other writers, which – I believe – is much more plausible; but it needs to be developed in a satisfactory way to escape various objections. This solution is that although Christ was predetermined not to do a wrong action (as well as not to do a non-supererogatory good action, and – if there was one – not a best or equal best possible action), and would have felt what any normal human would feel when tempted to do a wrong (or non-supererogatory,or not the best or equal best) action, he was nevertheless predetermined not to yield to

the temptation. Such an inclination could, for example, be caused by pain or frustration inclining him to do whatever was necessary to stop the pain or frustration, although he had an obligation to bear the pain or frustration.

Developing My Preferred Solution

The first objection to this fourth solution is that someone cannot really be tempted to do what they cannot do. That may follow, given the more usual use of the word "tempt". There is however a natural use of the word. "tempt", in which one can be tempted to do what one cannot not do. This is when one feels a strong desire to do what is wrong, but nevertheless has an even stronger desire not to yield to temptation, which leaves the balance of desire in favour of not yielding to it. Even those who are resolutely determined to keep some resolution, such as to eat only vegan food during Lent, and have made it impossible for them not to keep the resolution, can still feel temptation not to do so. It is still a "temptation" in this sense because it makes it harder to keep the resolution, but there may be no danger that the agent will not keep it. In his play *Murder in the Cathedral* T. S. Eliot has Thomas A' Becket say to the First Tempter, who urges him to make his peace with the King, "The impossible is still temptation". For this defence to the first objection, see Pawl (2019, pp. 143-146)

The second objection to the fourth possible solution is the traditional objection which I have already raised, that it has the consequence that Christ would not have had free will of the kind which all other humans have as a result of their human nature, the ability to choose to do wrong or right[2]. But it does not follow from Christ being capable of sinning, that he would ever be in a position where he could exercise that capacity. Humans are creatures of habit; in many situations where we have a choice of whether to do the morally obligatory action or whether to do what is morally wrong,

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[2] Pawl (2019, p. 152-3) claims that there is no "power to sin, properly so called "; humans have powers to "eat" or "run" , but not to "sin " , and so presumably not to do what is right or wrong Even if this claim expresses the normal English use of the word "power", it seems a trivial verbal point. Having the power to sin is having the power to do actions of certain kinds (e.g. eat), when it would be sinful to exercise that power. Humans evidently have powers of the former, and so the latter, kind. Pawl goes on to add that, when it is said that Christ "is unable to sin", the traditional view is that it means "no matter what circumstances Christ is in, he will not sin". That seems almost right, but my suggestion is that it is necessary to add after "circumstances", "among the circumstances in which it is causally possible that Christ in his human nature could find himself". Of course Christ in his divine nature (like the Father and the Holy Spirit) could not sin in any logically possible circumstances, and his freedom is a freedom to choose between innumerable equal best alternatives, or (if each alternative possible action is less good than some other possible action) his freedom is simply a freedom to choose one of them.(For a developed account of God's perfect freedom, see my 2016, pp. 142 – 149.) The freedom of the saints in heaven must be also, in my view, of this kind, since they are not subject to the bad desires to which earthly humans may succumb; and so their human nature is not an earthly human nature, but a heavenly human nature, more perfect than that of Adam, who was capable of sinning. But the good choices available to the saints in heaven are of course far more limited than those available to God…

often we do the morally obligatory action automatically – we do not have to exercise our free will to decide whether to do right or wrong. Yet for each of us there is a range of choices where it needs effort on our part freely to do the right action; on one side of that range, there is no possibility, and we know that there is no possibility, of us making the wrong choice ; and on the other side of that range there is no possibility and we know there is no possibility of us making the right choice. I will call a choice between right and wrong actions where it needs effort on our part about how to exercise our free will "a serious choice". But for each of us that range of choice is different. If I see that a passer-by has by accident let a lot of money fall out of his pocket without noticing it, and I have the opportunity to pick it up unnoticed by anyone and steal it, I know that I would not do this; I would, automatically, draw the attention of the passer-by to the fact that he has dropped the money. I do not have a serious choice in this situation. And no doubt there are some people who would not hesitate to take the money; it would come to them naturally to do so. But there are some people who would wonder whether to do what they realise is the wrong action – to pick up the money and take it for themselves, and then may or may not choose to take the money. Taking the money was within the range where they needed to make a serious choice of how to exercise their free will. But most people who have to make a serious choice in that situation whether or not to steal the money, would not hesitate not to commit a murder to get a large sum of money, even if they were convinced that they would not be suspected of responsibility for the murder. They would not have a serious choice of whether to commit a murder. For different people, the range where they have a serious choice of how to exercise their free will is different; and consequently some humans may have a narrow range, and maybe it happens that some humans never have a serious choice, because they are never in a situation where they would need to exercise their free will. But it cannot be part of having a power, that the possessor is sometimes in a position to exercise it. An athlete may have the power to run a four-minute mile, but never exercise this power because he has always competed over shorter distances. So the range over which Christ could have had a serious choice of how to exercise his free will might be different from that of most humans. Christ could have an human free will, just like our human free will, even if, unlike most and perhaps all other humans, he never had a serious choice within his range of how to exercise his free will; and it could have been predetermined that he would never be in a situation where he could do so. In that case, he would necessarily be sinless.

But that leads to a third possible objection that if Christ was necessarily predetermined not to do wrong, there could not be a plausible "objective" theory of the atonement, that is a theory on which atonement for sin is only available to us because of Christ's life and his death on the cross.[3] For if Christ was predetermined to live this life and death, it would not be a praiseworthy act which secured this end; we would have no reason to praise him for his life of sacrifice and his death on the cross. Again, that does not follow, because agents are morally responsible for doing what they do, even if they are caused to do it by some chain of causes, if they originate the

[3] The need for a theory of the nature of Christ's human nature to be compatible with a satisfactory "objective" theory of the Atonement is stressed by Bartel (1991), although he leaves it open, which theories of Christ's nature are thus compatible

chain. The terrorist who lays a mine which explodes under a vehicle many hours later when a driver starts the car's engine, is morally guilty for killing the driver, even though the immediate cause of the killing is the completion of an electric circuit in the car's engine. A perfectly good God will inevitably in any situation do the best possible action, where there is a best possible action. But in a situation where there are several equal best possible actions, a perfectly good God will need freely to choose which action to do. God had to choose freely before the creation of the universe, one of many possible universes. Given that he had chosen to create human beings with free will in a world with suffering and death, God had the choice of whether to permit them to sin seriously by causing severe suffering to other humans or not to permit them to sin seriously in this way. Then, if God chose the former, he had the choice of whether if they sinned seriously, either automatically to forgive them if they repented; or whether to punish them severely for sinning, even if they repented; or whether himself to become incarnate and provide atonement for them by his own sacrificial life if they repented. He had no obligation to create a world of this latter kind, and so no obligation to become incarnate in such a way as to suffer a painful death as a punishment for a crime which he did not commit, and so, for example, allow himself to be crucified. I suggest further that it is not obviously better that he should have made that latter choice than that he should have made any of the rival choices outlined above - especially in view of the severe suffering that would almost certainly be caused by permitting humans to cause such suffering to other humans and himself. Hence, it is equally compatible with his perfect goodness that he should make that choice, which Christian tradition claims that he did make, than that he should not make that choice. Given that he did make that choice, he executed it by becoming incarnate as Jesus Christ, in first century CE Judea, where he foreknew that he would be crucified (or stoned to death, or executed in some other way) for living the kind of life which Jesus lived and giving the kind of teaching which Jesus gave[4] When he chose to become incarnate in such a way as to allow himself to be crucified, he knew the degree of the pain he would need to endure , and so made the choice to endure pain of that degree.[5] Hence he is morally responsible, and so greatly praiseworthy by humans, the

[4] Christ's foreknowledge of what would happen to him, could not have been foreknowledge of a seriously chosen free human decision to crucify God Incarnate -given that no one can foreknow infallibly how a seriously acting free agent will choose. But he could foreknow that some powerful Jews would unthinkingly choose to execute (legally or illegally) anyone who behaved like Jesus did. The Gospels suggest that Pilate had to make a serious choice, but that there were some Jews who would seek to kill Jesus without them having to make a serious choice.

[5] It is often claimed that someone can only know what some kind of experience is like, if they have had an experience of that kind themselves. But this claim must be false. In humans particular experiences are caused by particular brain states; and humans normally know what experiences of some kind are like, because they have brain states caused by having had similar experiences in the past. Now suppose I am cloned, when adult. The clone will have the same brain states as myself, including the brain states caused in me by having had experiences of that kind. So the clone will know what it is to have experiences of that kind, although he will not have had them himself. Hence there is no sound objection to supposing that Christ in choosing to become incarnate in a certain situation and to live a certain sort of life for which it was likely that he would be crucified, would know exactly what he would have to endure; and so that he chose to endure these things freely – although he made the choice a long time before he would need to endure them.

beneficiaries of this choice (freely made before the creation of the world) which alone involved his own great suffering, for its effects which he had previously freely predetermined that he would permit; and thereby provided an objective atonement for human sins.

Finally, I come to a fourth objection, which – if accepted – does require an additional assumption that is contrary to much Christian tradition, but not – as far as I can see – contrary to any doctrines regarded as essential by Roman Catholic or Orthodox "churches". The objection (see for example Morris, 1986, pp. 147 – 148) claims that for an agent to be tempted to do a particular action in some situation facing them, it must be "epistemically possible" for the agent to do that action; that is the agent must believe that he is able to yield to the temptation. Even given the way I have met the previous objections, Christ might not have believed in his human nature that he would never be in a situation where he would have to exercise his free will to choose between doing wrong and doing right. Hence he could be faced with a situation where (at that time). he believed that he was being tempted to make a free serious choice between doing right and doing wrong, and so suffer the agonies of conscience - while in fact being predetermined to do the morally right action. He would then have believed that the choice open to him lay within his range of serious choices. And so he would then suffer the agonies of conscience which almost all humans feel, when faced with apparently (and in our case, often really) serious choices of how to exercise our free will. If Christ was open to the agonies of conscience, he would be significantly more like ourselves.

Christ would of course have known in his human nature that he would never succumb to temptation if he knew in that nature that he was himself God, and so was omniscient. By far the majority of Christian tradition has believed that Jesus Christ always (with his human beliefs and desires) knew that he was God incarnate. (See Pawl, 2019, pp. 139-143.) Thus the recent *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1994, # 273) explicitly stated that Christ in his human nature always knew this. However, as far as I can see, there is no conciliar definition or other definition regarded by Catholics or Orthodox as essential for Christian doctrine, that he did have this belief at every moment of his existence. He must have had it at some moment of his existence in order to communicate this truth to his disciples, at least by doing acts which they would recognise after his Resurrection, as showing his divinity. Such acts include forgiving sins (Mark 2:7), and announcing that he would replace the God-instituted Temple ritual of atoning for sins by sacrificing animals, by the sacrifice of himself. (See the analysis of Christ's sayings about this in Swinburne 2003, pp. 103-108.) But there is no other reason why he would need to hold this belief at every moment of his existence. And, there is one time at which a Gospel records that Christ expressed ignorance, when he said, with regard to the time of the end of the world, "about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mark 13:32). Also, the assertion (Luke 2:52) that the young Christ "increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour" implies that he did not initially know everything. To read these two texts as compatible with Christ knowing his divinity, and so being omniscient, is to impose on the texts meanings different from their obvious literal meanings; and can only be justified on the basis of a Christian doctrine established by some other route. Also, if we are to take Christ's words on the cross,

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 47:46), as Christ asking God a question which assumes that God has forsaken him, there was at least one other occasion on which he did not believe himself to be God. There is no need however to understand this latter saying of Christ as assuming that God has forsaken him; one can understand it equally well as drawing attention to the psalm (Psalm 22 in the Western way of counting psalms) of which these are the first words. Christ was drawing attention to the fact that that psalm perfectly expressed what was happening to him at that time, as well as prophesying his ultimate victory.

It follows from the previous discussion that unless there were times, at which Christ did not have the belief that he was God, all the temptations to which he was exposed, must be of a kind, such that he foreknew that he would not yield to them. My own inclination is to believe that (in his human nature) Christ's knowledge of his own divinity was -during his earthly life – intermittent; sometimes it was obvious to him that he was God incarnate, and sometimes he doubted it (while of course in his divine nature always believing this.) If he was to share our suffering more fully, he must sometimes be in this situation of not knowing that he was God; and in this respect majority Christian tradition may be mistaken. However, even if he did not always believe that he was God, he still could have believed truly that he would never succumb to temptation, for some other reason – but it is not obvious what it might be. But whether or not Christ is different from other humans in this respect, in having a false belief that he would sometimes succumb to temptation, the main point of this paper remains – that Christ can have a human free will without danger that he may do moral wrong.

I conclude that the definition of the Third Council of Constantinople, is perfectly compatible with the human Christ being morally responsible for his actions in the way that human beings are, since he – the same person – freely willed those actions long before he had to perform them.

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