Christ, the cosmos and critical realism

Lawson, F.

Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski University, Warsaw: 15th-16th October 2019

Science – Philosophy – Theology. Dialogue areas and perspectives

Full Paper: <u>Christ, the Cosmos & Critical Realism</u>

If one accepts the premise that both science and theology are engaging with a reality that can be referred to, but which is beyond the range of a literal description, then science and theology can be brought in to meaningful dialogue through a framework of critical realism. This paper examines the implications of scientific perspectives on the nature of the world for our concept of the incarnate Son of God. The critical realism of Polkinghorne and Peacocke, set out in their Gifford Lectures, invites us to consider a world that is more holistic than the dualistic picture adopted in many Christological discussions. It can be argued that the "paradox" narrative of the incarnation is the result of a misperception of the nature of reality forcing a choice between the adoption of a) an "enchanted" Cartesian ontology or b) acceptance of a "scientific" reductionist ontology. The ontological and theological problems associated with either view have led to the conflation of paradox with mystery. This paper suggests the adoption of a holistic ontology suggested by some interpretations of quantum theory open science and theology to the opportunity of a re-imagined dialogue that seeks to "answer questions about the existence, nature and interrelation of different kinds of entities" (Gohner and Schrenk, 2019) and where at the very least theology is consonant with science.

The task of Christian theology is to not only reconcile our understanding of God with our experience of the world, but also with the historical and theological person of Christ and His relationship with God. We can no less come to study God without entering through our understanding of God as revealed through Christ than we can come to study Christ without bringing to bear our pre-existing understanding of the nature of God as Father, and Trinity. Because of this it can be argued 'Christian doctrine *is always in the making*, in the process of formation' (Wiles, 2011, p. 1 emphasis added). To claim that doctrine is in a process of continual change requires the Christian theologian to critically examine and develop their *understanding* of the central truths of our doctrines.

If one starts with God, 'to begin with the being of God and then to consider his becoming man' (Wiles, 2011, p. 44) one is able to recognise the interrelation within the Trinity, and between a Trinitarian God and creation. This shifts Christology to something more than a historical study. Firstly, we must consider how we express our knowledge of the person and substance of Christ in language that is accessible through our contemporary *epistemology*. Secondly, we must develop a critical understanding of the *substance* of our belief, to challenge the underlying theological and ontological assumptions that frame and in some instances constrain our understanding of God and Christ. By bringing in to focus the "division" between the nature or person of Christ (his being) and the works and action of Christ in the world (his doing) we highlight two very different methods of Christological enquiry: 'Functional Christology' that focuses on the actions of Christ past and present and 'Ontological Christology' that focuses on the substance and being of Christ. Whilst it is possible to argue that there has historically been a focus on understanding Christianity in 'primarily practical terms' (Macquarrie, 1990, p. 7) there is an increasing move tao acknowledge that our understanding of Christs' being is

deeply bound up in our metaphysical and ontological understanding of the nature of the world.

Christology: Epistemology & Ontology

The challenge of defending an orthodox interpretation of Chalcedon means that Christian theology, must engage in a meaningful way with questions of metaphysics and ontology and as such ensure that it does not limit itself to simply dealing 'only or even primarily with manifestations and functions' (Woodfin, 1972, p. 137). If it fails to engage with questions of ontology it also fails to ensure that that it is tackling the correspondence between our expression (of faith or reality) and reality itself. Thus the engagement of theology with scientific ontology becomes of central importance in ensuring that 'metaphysical issues and the believer's conviction *regarding the nature of divine reality are at least analogically comparable*' (Woodfin, 1972, p. 138) or, for Torrance, to even pose questions as without ontological congruence between reality and experience our discourse is meaningless.

There has been a long tradition of making a distinction between what can be *known* of God and how this is reconciled to what we know of the world. Apophatic theology calls us to recognize the limitations of our language and creaturely knowledge when speaking of the nature of God, but in doing so it can allow us to distance ourselves from the ontological implications of belief in a God who made Himself known through the incarnate Son. Christology poses a unique challenge because it requires that one examines no simply the *essence* of what it means for there to be a personal, creator God, but more fundamentally to develop an understanding of what it means for such a being to come *into relation* with the world by becoming *part of* the world. It is in making this distinction that one comes against the boundaries of epistemology and ontology that lies at the heart of metaphysical enquiry.

This paper is not a work of philosophy of religion, or isolated metaphysical enquiry, however, if one recognizes the opening claim that both theology and science are "truth-seeking" then one also has to acknowledge that just as scientists step beyond their "narrow bounds" to understand the reality beyond their results, so too must we a theologians engage with metaphysical and cosmological enquiry to enrich our understanding of the nature of God. This is not to seek of the removal of divine mystery but it is to call for us to ensure that there is congruence between reality and theology. The claim of paradox within the Trinity and incarnation stems from an implicit dualistic metaphysics in which no sense can be made of immaterial and material 'two Natures unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably' (Chalcedon) becoming *one* substance/person/hypostases. The claim to paradox is based on ontological commitments rather than an epistemological claim that we cannot know how this was possible.

> To say that Christ is a single hypostasis who joins together two wholly distinct and unequal natures – the transcendent, infinite, foundational reality of God and the limited reality of a historical human being – in a 'mode of union' which constitutes his present personal reality is to say that he is a living paradox. (Daley SJ, 2004, pp. 194–195)

The Incarnation is frequently described as one of the greatest paradoxes of the Christian faith, however such proclamations raise two key issues (1) what is meant by paradox and how does this differ from mystery? (2) What metaphysical assumptions are raised by claiming paradox?

This paper will only briefly touch on the first. I will focus on the second and how this relates to the dialogue between scientific & theological metaphysics. The claim that the incarnate God is "a living paradox" rests upon ontological assumptions about the nature of substance and/or persons. For medieval theologians the difficulty of reconciling human and divine natures Christ rests on the premise 'that the assumed human nature [of Christ] is something like an individual substance' (Cross, 2002, p. 29). However, it can be argued that the premises for "paradoxes" in theology mirror our understanding that 'the basic philosophical questions come from troubles with our ordinary conceptual scheme' (Sorensen, 2003, p. xi), yet for all it might be argued that overcoming paradox is about challenging our existing conceptual or ontological scheme, it has taken on a significant role within our theological discussion that moves far beyond this.

Parádoxos (παράδοξος) is used once in the entirety of the Bible (Luke 5:26) in that instance it is often translated as "strange" or "wonderful" things. It is used to point beyond the ordinary, and yet within Christian theological literature it has taken on a far more prominent position; with 'the notion that traditional Christian conceptions of God and his relation to the world suffer from internal logical difficulties' (Anderson, 2007, p. 1) having a long history. Within its theological use "paradox" therefore seems to have strayed a long way from the discussion of something that is strange or unusual to something that is so deeply contradictory it cannot possibly be reconciled through reason.

Many such as de Lubac and Kierkegaard have argued that Chirst as the "living paradox" provides meaning for the contrary claims. However, it is possible to argue that to fully engage with theology one must start not with Christ or scripture but with our human understanding of the world. It is our understanding of the world alongside the fundamental limits to human understanding that shape the aporetic human experience that leads to the claim of paradox.

There is no consensus regarding the meaning or use of "paradox" within theology, and this is compounded by the fact that there is no consensus on whether the doctrines that are "paradoxical" are so due to the implied metaphysics, or logically paradoxical. In other words, do the paradoxes of the Christian faith rest in the limitations of theological language? Our metaphysical assumptions? Or the nature of reality itself? In this paper I will argue that the claim to paradox arises from our metaphysical assumptions, especially in response to the "rise" of materialism. Fundamentally "paradox" implicitly contains a notion of tension between two components, which is problematic if, as in the case of the incarnation, we don't have enough knowledge about the two components

to know that they are in tension[1]. Particularly in relation to Christology the tension narrative can be seen to be fundamentally based in our metaphysical assumptions. In contrast to Lutheran notions of paradox, the Catholic understanding of mystery does not require a tension narrative, rather an acceptance of our limits as finite beings and an acknowledgment of things we do not understand. Given the complexity around terminology is perhaps unsurprising that McGaughey seeks to avoid our presuppositions and speak of aporia/the aporetic over paradox. Aporia acknowledges the "unknowingness" or mystery that lies at the heart of human experience and in doing so denies the rationalist/empiricist propensity to elevate the role of reason in human experience, or indeed to place reason at the heart of faith. Aporia then, recognises 'a dialectical interaction between irreducible yet contradictory components' (McGaughey, 1997, p. 40) rather than privileging one side of the tension over the other acknowledges the necessity of both components as well as their 'irreconcilability' (McGaughey, 1997, p. 39) .

Therefore "paradox" implies a metaphysical state that combines (or attempts to combine) dichotomous states of affairs. Particularly in relation to theological questions these metaphysical assumptions rest upon dualistic opposition, in which one part of the dichotomy is raised above the other: to material-immaterial, pure-sinful, simple-complex, good-evil. When it comes to the "paradox" of the incarnation it is the divide between material and immaterial that is brought to the fore but this assumed dichotomy rests upon the privileging the material world (accessible to our senses) over that which is inaccessible.

To reconcile this dichotomy Aquinas created what has become known as a reduplicative strategy to deal with the two natures in Christ and their apparently contradictory properties such as the immutability of God and the changeable nature of man. Stump identifies three key areas of Aquinas' metaphysics that feed in to his interpretation of Chalcedon (i) his understanding of matter and form (ii) the relationship between individuation and identity (for physical substance); and (iii) the relationship between constitution and identity. In practice this means that if the constituents of a new whole existed as substances prior to becoming a composite of the new whole then its substantial form also changes such that it no longer has the substantial form of x as x but rather it shares in the substantial form of y [new object]. In other words, 'they cease to exist as things in their own right when they are conjoined into the whole, and a new thing is generated' (Stump, 2004, p. 200). For Aquinas therefore, it is the substantial form that individuates an object – it is this thing because it has this form[2]. Therefore, identity of individuals is bound up with the substantial form (not nature) of

---

[1] There are a number of definitions for paradox, and not all define paradox as an actual contradiction. However at this point it is only necessary to have in mind that paradox is based in tension (whether this is genuine or apparent is not pertinent at this time).

[2] It can be argued that what Aquinas is pointing to is that the individuating substantive form touches on the very nature of the object it "shapes". Whilst not explicitly his intention, this idea can be seen to be echoed in Esfeld's comments on the nature of the "more than" that moves something from an atomistic to a holistic system. Whilst this will be discussed later in the thesis it is valuable to highlight the metaphysical parallels that can be made between theological and scientific/philosophical approaches to understanding individuation in a non- Cartesian world. Cf Esfeld, 2013, sec. 5.1

an object, and as such 'substantial forms […] [unlike natures] are individual rather than universal' (Stump, 2004, p. 202). However, whilst matter and form combine to create a given object, Aquinas' metaphysics does not conflate constitution with identity, rather the whole is formed of more than the sum of its constituent parts, or the properties those parts exhibit prior to becoming constituents of the whole. To capture the "more than" that means individuals (objects) are more than there constituent parts Aquinas uses the Latin term "supposit" (or hypostasis).

On Aquinas' metaphysical model constitution is not identity – and therefore it is necessary to understand how the properties of the parts contribute to the identity of the whole. If this can be clearly articulated, it may be possible to provide a model of the incarnation in which the properties of Christ the man and Christ the Son of God are not paradoxical properties of an individual substance. A supposit is an individual substance, and a "person" is an individual substance with a rational nature. For Aquinas this requires defining the terms broadly when used in relation to God and Christ, this is due to his adherence to the doctrine of divine simplicity. Because God is simple he does not belong to any (Aristotelian) category, if a strict definition was adopted God would not be a substance and therefore Christ wouldn't be a supposit of the Trinity. Both Stump and Aquinas use the terms broadly to develop an understanding of the identity of Christ in which the properties are non-contradictory.

Christology, Science and Critical Realism

The metaphysics that underpins our theological discussion is not only central to understanding the claims we can make about God, but also in understanding the extent to which we can see/understand God through revelation in the natural world. The concept of the Incarnation, of God made flesh pushes any metaphysical (ontological) understanding of the nature of the world to its very limits and because of this it is important to understand the ways in which metaphysics and theology have been brought into conversation in recent years.

In *Science and Creation* Polkinghorne clearly highlights the place of emergentism (with respect to novel creation) and reductionism within our understanding. He argues that whilst the universe may be formed of fundamental particles (such as quarks, gluons, etc.) with the increase in complexity at each level new possibilities such as life or consciousness that couldn't have been formed by the quark in isolation, become possible. To claim that life, or consciousness can be reduced to the simpler levels below (as a strong reductionist would require) is 'inadequate to describe the world of our experience' (Polkinghorne, 2006, p. 47). Polkinghorne argues that metaphysics has an important role to play in interpreting the relationships between physical theories and reality itself, as this requires an 'ontological openness' and an acknowledgement that the 'portfolio of causes that bring about the future is not *limited solely to the description offered by a methodologically reductionist physics*' (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 35) but rather should be broad enough to include "holistic effects".

It could be argued that the concern that the impact strong reductionism has on our ability to understand the world in its fullness is tied to an adherence to critical realism (with respect to both science and theology). Whilst he refers to the need for critical realism in many of his works, the clearest arguments are to be found in *Belief in God in an Age of Science* (2003) where he argues that 'in their different ways and in their different domains, each is concerned with the search for truth' (2003, p. 100). It is the conviction in critical realism in relation to both science and theology that should allow for the use of scientific metaphysics in our theological thinking. The place of critical realism isn't unique to Polkinghorne however and can be seen in the earlier works of Barbour (1971, chap. 6) and Peacocke[3] as well as contemporary work by McGrath (2019, chap. 2).

Of particular relevance to this paper are Barbour's comments on the symbolic nature of scientific language where he highlights the need for a non-literal understanding of scientific theories and a recognition that scientific theories/language (particularly in relation to the description of theories in physics) have often been understood in light of naïve rather than critical realism. This, could arguably be seen to develop David Ritchie's comments nearly a century before:

> We know that even the mathematician, still more the physicist or the biologist, is apt to trespass beyond the limits of his special science and to put forward the abstractions or the conventional concepts, of which in his special science *he has rightly made use, as if they were absolute realities, truths about the universe as a whole, truths about the ultimate nature of things*. (p.14)

It is the '*abandonment of picturability*' (1971, p. 157 emphasis in original) within contemporary science that speaks to the relevance of our scientific metaphysics and language to our theological discourse. The fact that within science we are dealing with a world that speaks of a reality different to our everyday understanding in which only the use of 'highly abstract symbolism' can describe a "world" in which is 'in accessible to direct observation, and inexpressible in terms of the senses; we are unable to even imagine it' (Barbour, 1971, p. 158) has distinct echoes of the challenges faced by the theologian. Additionally, in *The Territories of Human Reason* McGrath speaks to Bhaskar's critical realist framework as affirming 'the ontological unity of reality, whilst recognizing that this unity expressed itself at different levels' (2019, p. 67) these different levels not only refer to knowledge that can be gained through different disciplines but also the methods that are available at each level. Baskar's approach has echoes of Torrence's comments that science and theology can and should give an account of (their) reality 'according to its distinct nature' (1969, p. 10) and whilst both approaches accept and reaffirm a stratified account of the nature of reality, neither seeks to claim a reductionist model in which the lower levels determine the nature of those above. Again, the key message is that 'the complexity of the world requires the

---

[3] For a brief overview in relation to scientific critical realism see Peacocke (1993, pp. 11–14); For a brief overview of the relationship to critical realism in theology see (1993, pp. 14–19)

use of multiple levels of explanation, both within the natural sciences and beyond' (McGrath, 2019, p. 66).

It may appear that such models of critical realism sit directly in opposition to the need for theological metaphysics to be informed by scientific ontology, with the call that each discipline can and should focus on its correct "object of study". However, to adopt this position is to fall in to a category mistake that the objects of study for science and religion (the very realities they seek to describe) exist in entirely distinct and unrelated spaces. Instead, what critical realism should be understood as offering is a conceptual framework in which our discussions can take place that allows for a deeper understanding than that provided by a reductionist model. In order to develop of full and rich understanding of the nature of our reality we must understand that these perspectives or level of enquiry are bounded by our conventions not by the intrinsic nature of the reality they describe. The "object" of Christian theology's study is 'God's self-revelation in Christ' (McGrath, 2019, p. 68) yet this revelation took place in and through the world described by the natural sciences. Therefore, our theological framework needs to find a way to hold the reality revealed by and through Christ in correlation or integration with the reality of the world he came in to (as described by the natural sciences) so that we can develop a richer, more nuanced understanding of the reality of our reality that doesn't try to reduce or explain away its richness.

The key to the use of critical realism in both theology and science rests in the fact that it is not a claim that everything can or will be adequately explained, or that analogy does not serve a valid descriptive role in our discussions (more on this later), rather that critical realism requires the scholar to acknowledge the incompleteness (and limitations) of our current understanding of the nature of reality. The challenge therefore in bringing science and theology into dialogue, lies not understanding the role of metaphysics in our theology, but in appreciating that our scientific metaphysics has the opportunity for as much "ontological openness" as our theological metaphysics when we understand that we are not 'limited solely to the description offered by a methodologically reductionist physics framed only in terms of the exchange of energy between constituents' (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 35)

Perhaps the biggest interplay between theology, (philosophy), and metaphysics rests in our discussion of the composition of the incarnate Christ. Recent and notable works by Le Poidevin (2009; 2009), Thomas Senor (2011, 2007), Brian Leftow and Michael Gorman (2014) to name but a few, have focused on trying to align our doctrinal account of Christ as fully God and fully man with a metaphysically coherent view of personhood. These discussions along with the work of Eleanor Stump (2004) on Aquinas' metaphysics show a scholarly return to an examination of the reduplicative strategy or *Qua* propositions. A detailed examination of the Qua propositions is beyond the scope of this paper which has a focus on examining why attempting to align our theology with an ontological binary highlights the importance of moving our discussion beyond these terms. The strategy highlights the unquestioned nature of our assumption that the world is divisible in to parts. For example in his abstract to *Identity and the Composite Christ* Le Poidevin states that the only solutions to avoiding paradox when viewing Christ as a

composite being (and therefore a being in whom various properties can be ascribed to human or divine parts) are: 'to choose between modifying the orthodox understanding, adopting a philosophically and theologically contentious perdurantist account of persistence through time, or rejecting altogether the idea of a composite Christ' (2009, p. 167). The problem rests in placing divine and human in discrete categories. It is this categorisation that holistic metaphysics challenges.

Scientific Ontology: Christology in the world

This leads to the question of the role of scientific ontology in our Christological discussion. John W Cooper (2000) presents a clear, albeit brief, account of the development of a scientific-informed Christology. 'Reversing the historic order of revelation and reason, [naturalist theologians] engaged in biblical interpretation and theological construction within the framework of the philosophy and science that developed after Galileo and Newton.'(Cooper, 2000, p. 37) Adoption of a theistic naturalism in relation to understanding the body and soul has arisen from attempts to synthesize theological and scientific worldviews. Non-dualistic alternatives (such as emergentism and psychophysical monism) have been developed to explain and defend against the rise of a reductionist materialist (scientistic) stance and allow for genuine human agency and spirituality.

Whilst the historic dualistic position, arguably, supports in understanding persons as having free will & spiritual natures, it gives rise to issues in relation to causality, interaction and understanding the self as a unified individual. Other, more reductionist models such as theistic naturalism and monistic anthropology are not mainstream, however supporters argue that they will gain increasing support as the dualist position appears to become ever more detached from the scientific understanding of reality: 'They wish to show that the Christian faith is not tied to an outdated philosophy and science' (Cooper, 2000, p. 40). Without an immaterial soul under theistic naturalism, it is only the resurrection (if it indeed happened), that separates Christ's divine and human natures. Whereas the monistic position offers an internally inconsistent understanding of the nature(s) of Christ and appears to bring into question an orthodox interpretation of Chalcedon. The rise therefore of scientific naturalism can also be understood as a move away from the "unscientific" concept of substance dualism. In the years since Descartes and with the (apparently) increasing materialistic understanding of the nature of the world; Christology, and the ability of an immaterial divine person to be causally and meaningfully engaged with the "physical" world, has led to theology appearing to be evermore out of step with our "disenchanted" understanding of the world. However, an increasing number of scholars are questioning such strictly materialist stances to protect an orthodox understanding of Chalcedon.

As highlighted earlier the association of the incarnation with paradox rests, to a large extent on the metaphysical assumptions associated with reconciling scientific ontology with our theological discussion. In what follows I will briefly examine how the claim of paradox may be due to an assumption regarding the relationship between constitution and identity. The questions will not be answered at this stage however exploring them at this time highlights the relationship between claims of "paradox" and metaphysics. Which will be examined in relation to scientific ontology later in this paper.

The reduplicative strategy isn't in favour in contemporary theology as it is viewed as being too logically inconsistent to provide a valid response to concerns of paradox in the incarnation. A key feature of the reduplicative strategy rests in the distinction between constitution and identity. The argument in favour of the reduplicative strategy rests in the fact that the "whole" can borrow properties from the constituent parts. Whilst the whole (incarnate Son of God) may have properties in its own right, such as offering salvation to mankind, it has other properties such as mortality due the properties of its constituents (the substantial form of being human). Thus, Christ the incarnate Son of God "borrows" the property of morality qua humanity. Christ can therefore die on the cross by virtue of having a human body and soul, whilst the death on the cross is attributed to Christ as a whole to ensure the salvific value, yet God cannot die. Therefore, the whole must borrow the property of being able to die from the human constituent of Christ. Whilst this appears, in part to mitigate the problem, I believe it is Leftow's response to Stump that highlights the difficulties with the reduplicative strategy[4]. In correspondence with Stump Leftow argues that certain properties held by Christ are held by the "whole" in its own right. In particular he argues that the omni- properties are held in their own right because if the property is held in its own right it can be used on certain occasions/ when contained within the right body. For example, it is possible to argue that God is able to die, doubt, suffer when He is incarnate within a human body, but not within a "non-physical" state. Likewise, the omni properties can be held by the Son of God when He is not incarnate, but not when He is within an incarnate body. Stump argues that it the crux of the issue is not which properties are borrowed from the constituents and which are held by the whole, but rather "the reasons for the ability in question' (Stump, 2004, p. 215). She argues that in the case of Christ the property of being omnipotent stems from the fact the divine nature (one of the constituents of Christ) has the property, and furthermore that omnipotence does not require the whole as 'if all the constituents of Christ other than the divine nature were removed, what remained would still be omnipotent' (Stump, 2004, p. 215). Both Stump and Leftow appear to view this as a coherent response to the question of the paradoxical nature of the incarnation, yet I would argue that the very fact that omnipotence can be attributed to the part but not the whole highlights the problematic nature of treating the incarnation as a "logical" inconsistency. It is possible to argue that the reduplicative solution works due to Aquinas' metaphysics but even Stump argues that this is pushed to the very limits in trying to defend a description of the incarnation that is compatible with the Chalcedonian definition. The notion of borrowed properties is taken up by Esfeld in his discussion of holism, and I feel that his approach provides a more coherent account that could be attributed to a reduplicative defence, yet it also provides as alternative that is able to overcome the implicit dualism that underpins Thomistic metaphysics.

The reduplicative strategy is grounded in Aquinas' metaphysical understanding of substance and natures, based on this metaphysical starting point Aquinas, Stump and

---

[4] Although Leftow also argues for a compositional account of the incarnation that can be seen to echo many of Stump's arguments, it is the challenge he raises to Stump's comments on Christ holding properties "as a whole" that highlight the issues of the reduplicative strategy. (For an account of some of the problems of the reduplicative strategy along with a comparison of Stump and Leftow's approaches cf. Senor, 2007

Leftow argue that it offers a mode for understanding the complexities of the incarnation that do not result in paradoxical claims being made of Christ. However, whilst the Thomistic understanding of substance/nature provides a framework for understanding the metaphysical implications of the divine becoming incarnate, I do not believe that it is able to provide an account that genuinely removes the "paradox". Stump tries to defend the strategy in the face of the criticism that whilst analogies can be made to physical objects where the whole "borrows" properties from some or all of its parts, this cannot be carried over to the incarnation due to the inclusion of non-physical parts. Stump's defence rests in the fact that literary work can be considered to exhibit different properties qua different genre lenses applied to the same work. E.g. serious qua theological commentary yet comic qua satire. However, such an analogy is rooted in two key assumptions that are not transferable to the case of the incarnation. In the first instance whether a text is deemed to provide a comedic/satirical or serious commentary on the issues at hand depends on how the text is interpreted. The interpretations can be understood as examining two different aspects of the same object – just as Ullyses could be examined for its properties as a doorstop as well as its properties as a classic literary text. It is possible to argue that interpretation of Christ's properties under different aspects of the incarnate Son of God brings the theological close to adopting a form of modalism (Sabellianism) in relation to the incarnate deity where the humanity and divinity become different modes of God's revelation through Christ. A further risk of adopting this approach to exploring non-physical properties rests in a genuine ontological distinction of category between the interpretation of the non-physical properties of a work of literature and the non-physical properties of a composite human (irrespective of the inclusion of a divine nature). Whether one views a text as satirical or a serious commentary depends on the lens through which on interprets that text. The decision to adopt one interpretation over another rests is bounded by many factors which include the interpreter's cultural upbringing, and reasons for analysing the text. One only needs to look to Ricoeur's work on the hermeneutics of revelation (1980) or time and identity (1990) to grasp an appreciation of the complexity of the formations of identity within discourse.

Does this need shortening/restructuring to focus more on the challenge of "borrowing" from the non-physical properties & link in more detail to Esfeld's arguments? Perhaps borrowing from the ESSSAT paper?

Understanding the context of the text and author may help us to understand how a singular text can be interpreted in different ways, but the move to interpretation of the non-physical properties of a person (whether divine/human) under similar criteria appears to entirely miss the nature of what it is that creates the "paradox" within the person of Christ. At issue is not the question of whether Christ could "borrow" non-physical properties from his human or divine constituents and as such reveal different properties at different times, but whether this "borrowing" can be understood to make sense at the metaphysical level. Both analogies provided by Stump in relation to borrowing physical and non-physical properties offer explanations of how a reduplicative strategy can work in different circumstances, however both seem to fail in capturing the implicit ontological distinctiveness that fuels the claim of paradox. In the case of

Stump's example of the molecule that is both coiled and non-coiled (2004, p. 212) we are dealing with physical properties that the same object could feasibly exhibit (even if there is a question of whether they could be exhibited at the same time). It does not seem possible, for a human being to be considered omnipotent, transcendent, or eternal given our understanding of what it means to be human, of the kinds of substance involved these non-physical properties cannot be attributed to the substance(s) that constitute a human being, and the literary analogy does not encapsulate this challenge. It is on this basis that I would argue the reduplicative strategy does not work to provide a solution to the claim of metaphysical paradox – it cannot account for contradictory properties being held by one nature even if those properties are accidental.

Senor argues that the reduplicative strategy is also unable to provide a defence against claims of the logical incoherence of the paradox, he justifies his argument on the grounds that the argument confuses properties and predicates – challenging the vagueness of our language rather than vagueness inherent in the objects themselves.'[F]or instance one might think that to have the property of "being black" an object must be black over 90 percent or more of its visible area. If this is the right account of the property of "being black" then every object will have or will lack that property simpliciter' (Senor, 2007, p. 68 emphasis added). Therefore, even when "borrowing" properties, the object will have that property (or not) simplicter, and it is the stronger property that is held simpliciter by the whole. To support his argument Senor appeals to the Aristotelian accounts of Non-contradiction, and it is to this that I shall now turn to examine if the "paradox" objection in fact rests in objection to apparent logical inconsistency.

Paradox is often taken to be synonymous with the law of non-contradiction (LNC) however this is not a given. In what follows I will discuss how non-contradiction was understood by Aristotle and Aquinas in relation to both metaphysics and theology before exploring how contemporary theologians and philosophers have taken up the debate. LNC is particularly pertinent to the debate regarding holism whereas the issues of contradictory and contrary attributes/language are highly pertinent to the question of our understanding the incarnation and the Son of God more generally.

It is necessary to explore LNC and LEM (Law of excluded middle) in relation to the incarnation because it could be argued that it is LEM leads to mystery and LNC to paradox even though they are often used synonymously (in both cases mystery-paradox; LNC-LEM). However before examining LEM it is necessary to explicate LNC more fully. It has been argued that there are three version of LNC within Aristotle (a) ontological, (b) doxastic, and (c) semantic. The ontological account deals with thing that exist in the world; the doxastic account deals with our (rational) beliefs, and the semantic account deals with assertion and truth. It is the first, ontological kind, that I am concerned about in relation to the paradox that may or may not reside on non-Boolean accounts of both the world and the objects within it. However, there is a question regarding the extent to which God can be said to be in the world and therefore whether (a) is applicable. Although it would appear that (a) may be of dubious application when speaking of the theistic God more generally, it is clearly a necessary

consideration in discussions of the incarnate Son of God. Jesus Christ was in the world and therefore it would seem unless we are dealing with God who regularly engages with logically impossible possibilities that LNC must apply with respect to the incarnation. Furthermore, although beyond the scope of this thesis, if God is genuinely immanent in the world, and therefore in the world that there may be a case to argue that as something within the world LNC must apply to the wider Trinitarian godhead at least during instances of immanence. Both (b) and (c) form the basis of Anderson's concerns about paradox in Christian theology Whilst both also play an important role in our theological conversations (b) and (c) raise quite a different question. Thus, without going any further it is possible to argue that Aristotle's concept of LNC can help us address:

1. How holism in relation to (a) help us to develop a more coherent and robust account of the incarnation?
2. Can we, with respect to (b) and (c) talk about God meaningfully, including when it seems to involve LNC such as with the incarnation.

The distinction between questions of LNC in relation to language and meaning versus questions of LNC relating to ontology is a crucial demarcation for the discussion of the incarnation. It may be possible to argue that (a) and (b) in combination play into our understanding of divine mystery whereas (b) and (c) deal with questions regarding the nature of religious language. Yet in addition this more nuanced distinction of the highlights that simply because something can be considered mysterious this doesn't necessarily mean that we have no language to describe it and/or the only way to move towards a description is via negativa. It has been argued that perhaps the only true way to navigate through divine mystery is to speak via negativa, yet there is a question as to how far speaking in via negativa terms is able to genuinely advance our knowledge if God. Whilst in some instances it is possible to gain much information from negative statements, such gains in knowledge rely, to a certain extent, on a Boolean conception of the world. For example, if whilst playing chess one said they were "not white" the implicit assertion is they are using the black pieces; however if commenting on which colour of the rainbow their house was one stated "not orange", this doesn't allow for the other person to gain any real knowledge about the colour of the house. The knowledge one is able to gain via negativa is dependent upon the number of alternatives available. To return to the divine, to say that God is "not corporeal" doesn't necessarily imply that God is a spiritual being (although this may be how we instinctively interpret it), scientific theories, imaginary numbers, dreams etc. are all non-corporeal but cannot be said to be "spiritual". In fact one can argue that the vagueness associated with via negativa statements about God appears to make them 'wholly vacuous…scarcely indistinguishable from agnosticism' (Macquarrie, 1970, p. 27) (Macquarrie, 1970, p. 27). Whilst it is important to allow for a level of "reverent agnosticism" true and justified faith is possible 'only on the basis that God has granted some positive knowledge of himself' (Macquarrie, 1970, p. 27). Acknowledging the difficulty of talking about God is not the same as saying we cannot talk of God in a meaningful way. Consequently the focus of this work will not be on whether we can articulate the apparent paradox of the incarnation (or any other theological doctrine) but rather how a re-articulation or a

move to 'portray the familiar in a novel way, so that some aspect of its true nature' (Jantzen, 1984, p. 2) can be understood and therefore work towards an understanding of the incarnation that is able to highlight the "difference-in-similarity" between our new holistic understanding of ontology and how such holistic unity occurred in the person of Christ.

When paradox is used in theological terms we need to strive for greater clarity on whether we are using it to refer to contradictory or contrary statements/aspects of God, and this is where we should start to see the use of mystery over paradox but this is not necessarily the case. Before examining our theological use of paradox further it is necessary to explore Aristotle's approach to LNC in more detail. For Aristotle the 'securest principle of all is that about which error is impossible' (Aristotle, 1998, chap. Gamma 3 1005b12) and therefore 'anyone studying anything of the things that are' (Aristotle, 1998, chap. Gamma 3 1005b15) must grasp LNC. Thus LNC is not arrived at through inference or hypothesis, nor is it the opening premise of an argument but rather something even more fundamental. Aristotle makes a clear distinction between contradictory and contrary statements. Contradictory statements are those that are 'mutually exhaustive as well as mutually inconsistent' (Horn, 2014, sec. 1) thus in regarding contradictory statements one must be true and the other false thus us refers to a "genuine contradiction" with respect to the statements. On the other hand contrary statements are those which are 'mutually inconsistent but not necessarily exhaustive' (Horn, 2014, sec. 1) these are statements in which it is possible for there to be a middle ground, in other words LEM does not apply to contrary statements only contradictory ones. Therefore, contrary statements could be understood as often to referring to only "apparent contradiction" and thus allowing for objects to be neither of the contrary statements, for example the "horse is white" and "the horse is black" does not require the horse to be either white or black thus it is clear to see the parallel between LEM/LNC and the earlier comments regarding Boolean versus non-Boolean descriptions in relation to understanding God.

Aquinas also takes up Aristotle's notion of non-contradiction as first principle 'the first indemonstrable principle is that "the same thing cannot be affirmed and denied at the same time" which is based on the notion of "being" and "not-being": and on this principle all others are based' (Aquinas, 2017, I-II, Q. 94, Art. 2). This is also echoed in Nicolas Cusanus' writings on the coincidence of opposites. Whilst, in what follows I will examine whether there we can genuinely discuss paradox in relation to God with respect to our knowledge about God. There is also a question, raised by Pickstock, as to whether LNC can apply to God as a non-limited being or if LNC loses its 'field of application' (2009, p. 130) with respect to God. Pickstock is able to make this claim due to the fact that Aristotle frames LNC/LEM in terms of being and not-being thus meaning that it is possible to claim the ontological divide between creator and created world mean that LNC cannot apply to God. However, it is possible to argue that these claims refer more to the role/applicability of analogy in our theological discussion and less to the more fundamental question of the applicability of first principles. This divide can be clearly seen echoed in the distinction between arguments that examine whether God can do the logically impossible versus arguments examining whether God can contain the

apparently contradictory. Nicholas Cusanus in his "coincidence of opposites" proposes that God is able to contain the apparently contradictory when he states 'with God we must, as far as possible, forestall contradictories […] we must not conceive of distinction and indistinction, for example as two contradictories, but […] where distinction is not other than indistinction' (Cusanus, 1997, sec. 57 p.113).

Finally, a discussion regarding LNC would not be complete without mention of dialetheism. Whilst an extensive discussion of the arguments surrounding dialetheism moves beyond the scope of this thesis it is necessary to note a significant number of Neoplatonists and modern philosophers (such as Hegel, Marx, Engels and more recently Graham Priest) have adopted dialetheism. Dialetheism argues that there are instances where both a statement and its negation can be held to be true and thus that here are instances when LNC does not hold. Aristotle does defend against LNC against the challenge of dialetheism, although it can be argued that his defences are weak and often confuse dialetheism with trivialism (see Priest and Berto).

Perhaps one of the most overwhelming issues associated with LNC and dialetheism resides in the fact that both are dependent upon, and assume, a bivalent understanding of truth and/or reality. In relation to truth LEM proposes a bivalent account (something is either A or not-A) in this case referring to the notion that something is either true or false. However, such an account of truth fails to adequately account for instances of vague predicates in which it is necessary to allow for 'an intermediate truth value between truth and falsity, or no truth value at all' (Priest and Berto, 2017, sec. 3.3). It is also possible to argue that dialetheism inevitably leads to a discussion of realist approaches to entities and the associated objective, external truth/falsity regarding our thoughts/beliefs etc. However, followers of dialetheism tend towards an antirealist understanding of truth in that it seems nonsensical to argue that there are 'inconsistent objects, situations, or states of affairs' (Priest and Berto, 2017, sec. 6) (a case of what Ryle would refer to a category mistake) rather there are only inconsistent truths. Yet Aristotle did not write of LNC/LEM in reference only to logic, but within Metaphysics. Priest and Burto conclude their article by asking 'if reality is dialetheic, how should the ontology of a dialetheic world be spelt out?'[5] My response is that the holistic metaphysics proposed later in this thesis, particularly in relation to Primas' Non-Boolean Holism does describe a dialetheic metaphysics and this is why the incarnation raises questions to do with "paradox" and "non-contradiction" because there is an assumption of bivalence that leads to the appearance of metaphysical contradiction when in fact there may simply be "mystery" or even semantic limitation.

This brings the discussion full circle to the issue of our assumed metaphysics in relation to Christological understanding. This issue is highlighted by Gorman (2014) in his exploration of the reduplicative strategy. Whilst Aquinas' approach to the strategy was discussed earlier Gorman's approach more closely mirrors the LNC methodology as he examines the reduplicative strategy as affirmation and denial statements (X is F qua…; X is not-F qua…) mirroring the challenge of LNC. The standard approach to qua

---

[5] ADD REF

statements is the implication that qua means "in virtue of…" i.e. Christ can be tempted qua (in virtue of) His humanity, where this is understood as a sufficient cause. On this model holding to the affirmation and denial does not resolve the issue of contradiction within the incarnation as follows:

> AFFIRMATION [A] Christ is human, and Christ is changeable, and Christ's being human makes it the case the Christ is changeable.

> NARROW DENIAL [DN] Christ is divine, and Christ is not changeable, and Christ's being divine makes it the case that Christ is not changeable[6].

The narrow denial and superficial reading of the statements still leads to the claim that Christ is changeable and not changeable due to the fact that it fails to account for the difference between necessary and sufficient explanations. Rather than *qua* being understood to make it "the case that", *qua* can also be understood as implying possibility rather can causality, but which if the "in virtue…" is taken to mean "makes it possible that…". This apparently slight change from "makes it the case" to "makes it possible" immediately removes the claim that [A] and [DN] imply F and not-F

> [A*] Christ is human, and Christ is changeable, and Christ's being human makes it possible for Christ to be changeable.

> [DN*] Christ is divine, and Christ is not changeable, and Christ's being divine doesn't make it possible for Christ to be changeable.

The move to a model of possibility rather than absolute causality allows that Christ's divinity/humanity ceases to be interpreted as the sufficient cause for Christ to exhibit specific attributes, and with the cessation of qua statements as statements of sufficiency they no longer violate LNC. This is a similar move to Aristotle's discussion potentiality and actuality. Just as a block of wood having the potentiality to be carved in to a bowl and a spoon, is not a contradictory or paradoxical, nor too does Christ having the potentiality to be both changeable and not-changeable (*qua* human/divine) violate LNC on this reading. A further way in which the *qua* statement can be understood as not violating LNC is if the negation statement is understood as having a wide [DW] rather than narrow [DN] remit. On a wider scope rather than divinity *preventing* Christ's changeable it can be understood as *failing to provide* for His changeability, in much the same way that a bird is not able to fly *qua* having legs. Having legs does not make the bird flightless [DN], rather they do not provide the means for a bird to fly [DW].

---

[6] Adapted from Gorman, 2014, p. 88 logical formulation: [A] "X is R, and X is F, and X's being R makes it the case that X is F" and [DN] "X is R, and X is not F, and X's being R makes it the case that X is not F"

The final challenge provided in relation to the *qua* statements' attributes is unique to Christ's being the incarnate Son of God and this is the two natures problem. Whilst Gorman's interpretation of the *qua* statements allows for the incarnation to be understood in a non-contradictory manner, in order for the reduplicative strategy to provide a genuine solution to the apparent paradox of the incarnation, it must be able to account for the fact that Christ has both a human and divine nature and that some attributes can be understood as properties of one or both of His natures. For example, Christ is loving *qua* His human nature **and** *qua* His divine nature, whereas He is only changeable *qua* His human nature. Not only is the reduplicative strategy able to provide a meaningful response to Christ's two natures but in considering the *qua* statements in relation to Christ we are able to draw out an important distinction in relation to LNC that isn't clear when discussing dingle natured entities. The point at hand is that attribute statements relating to Christ may apply to "some" or "all" of His natures. In claiming the reduplicative strategy breaches LNC we are starting from an assumption that we can infer and "all" statement from a "some" statement. For example, in order for the claim that Christ is not changeable *qua* His divinity to be a contradictory statement, it has to be taken to be made in relation to a single nature. Christ is not changeable *qua* His divinity does not mean that Christ (as a two natured entity) is unchangeable simpliciter – in much the same way as the bird's inability to fly *qua* having legs does not make it flightless simpliciter. Therefore rather than providing contradictory statements Christ is changeable qua humanity and Christ is unchangeable qua divinity do not offer contradictory statements that apply to "all" natures but rather both offer statements that refer to "some" of His natures and therefore, it can be argued, are no more contradictory than the bird who cannot fly because it has legs but can fly because it has wings.

Thus, from a point of logical paradox it would seem possible to overcome the apparent breach of LNC in relation to Christology. Development of a more nuanced understanding of the definition of *qua* and an account of the reduplicative strategy that allows for both wide and narrow scope denial statements seems to remove the logical contradiction implicit in such Christological statements. However, I would argue that whilst logically the issue can be resolved in this manner, there is still a key ontological question as to how it is possible to resolve Christ's human and divine natures without descending in to a form of Nestorianism in order to account for how these attributes were held in practice, particularly when we turn to attributes of the mind/ soul such as omniscience, suffering, love etc.

Critical Realism: Non-locality, Opportunity and "Paradox"

Xxxxx

References:

Anderson, J., 2007. Paradox in Christian theology: an analysis of its presence, character, and epistemic status, Paternoster theological monographs. Paternoster, Milton Keynes.

Aquinas, T., 2017. Summa Theologica. Independent Pub.

Aristotle, 1998. Metaphysics, Penguin classics. Penguin Books, London ; New York.

Barbour, I.G., 1971. Issues in Science and Religion. Prentice-Hall, London.

Cooper, J.W., 2000. Body, soul, and life everlasting: biblical anthropology and the monism-dualism debate. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Cross, R., 2002. The metaphysics of the incarnation: Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus. Oxford University Press, Oxford ; New York.

Cusanus, N., 1997. Selected spiritual writings, The classics of Western spirituality. Paulist Press, New York.

Daley SJ, B.E., 2004. Nature and the "Mode of Union": Late Patristic Models for the Personal Unity of Christ, in: Davis, S.T., Kendall SJ, D., O'Collins SJ, G. (Eds.), The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God ; Proceedings of the Incarnation Summit, Held Apr. 23 - 26, 2000 at Dunwoodie, Yonkers, N.Y.]. Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford, pp. 164–196.

Gohner, J., F., Schrenk, M., 2019. Metaphysics of Science. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (ISSN 2161-0002).

Gorman, M., 2014. Christological Consistency and the Reduplicative Qua. Journal of Analytic Theology 2, 86–100. https://doi.org/10.12978/jat.2014-1.120811061413a

Horn, L.R., 2014. Contradiction, in: Zalta, E.N. (Ed.), The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University.

Jantzen, G., 1984. God's world, God's body. Darton, Longman and Todd, London.

Le Poidevin, R., 2009. Identity and the Composite Christ: An Incarnational Dilemma. Religious Studies 45, 167–186.

Macquarrie, J., 1990. Jesus Christ in modern thought. SCM Press ; Trinity Press International, London : Philadelphia.

Macquarrie, J., 1970. God Talk: Examination of the Language and Logic of Theology, New impression edition. ed. SCM-Canterbury Press Ltd, London.

McGaughey, D.R., 1997. Strangers and pilgrims: on the role of Aporiai in theology, Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin ; New York.

McGrath, A.E., 2019. The Territories of Human Reason: Science and Theology in an Age of Multiple Rationalities, New product edition. ed. Oxford University Press, Newyork, NY.

Pickstock, C., 2009. Duns Scotus, in: Milbank, J., Oliver, S. (Eds.), The Radical Orthodoxy Reader. Routledge, London.

Poidevin, R.L., 2009. Incarnation: Metaphysical Issues. Philosophy Compass 4, 703–714. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-9991.2009.00222.x

Polkinghorne, J., 2006. Science and creation: the search for understanding. Templeton Foundation Press, Philadelphia.

Polkinghorne, J., 2005. Exploring Reality: The Intertwining of Science and Religion. SPCK, London.

Polkinghorne, J.C., 2003. Belief in God in an age of science, Terry lecture series. Yale Nota Bene, New Haven, Conn. ;London.

Priest, G., Berto, F., 2017. Dialetheism, in: Zalta, E.N. (Ed.), The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University.

Ricoeur, P., 1990. Time and Narrative, Volume 1: v. 1, New edition edition. ed. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Ill.

Ricoeur, P., 1980. Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation, in: Essays on Biblical Interpretation. Fortress Pr, Philadelphia, pp. 73–118.

Senor, T., 2011. Drawing on Many Traditions: an Ecumenical Kenotic Christology, in: Marmodoro, A., Hill, J. (Eds.), The Metaphysics of the Incarnation. Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 88–113.

Senor, T.D., 2007. The Compositional Account of the Incarnation. Faith and Philosophy 24, 52–71.

Sorensen, R., 2003. A Brief History of the Paradox: Philosophy and the Labyrinths of the Mind. Oxford University Press.

Stump, E., 2004. Aqinas' Metaphysics of the Incarnation, in: Davis, S.T., Kendall SJ, D., O'Collins SJ, G. (Eds.), The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God; Proceedings of the Incarnation Summit, Held Apr. 23 - 26, 2000 at Dunwoodie, Yonkers, N.Y.]. Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford, pp. 197–218.

Torrance, T.F., 1969. Theological Science, 1st Edition edition. ed. Oxford University Press, London, New York etc.

Wiles, M., 2011. The Remaking of Christian Doctrine, New edition edition. ed. SCM Press.

Woodfin, Y., 1972. Ontological Thresholds and Christological Method. Religious Studies 8, 137–146.