A CHALCEDONIAN CONUNDRUM: THE SINGULARITY OF THE HYPOSTASIS OF CHRIST

In 451 the Council of Chalcedon declared that the incarnation must be understood as the union of a divine and a human nature in one hypostasis. Later Chalcedonian theologians named this hypostasis Christ and interpreted it as a composite of two parts. At the same time they adapted for their purposes the conceptual framework that the Cappadocians had developed for the Trinity. According to this framework, beings which share a set of natural idioms are distinguished from each other through specific characteristics that accede to these idioms. Having taken these steps, however, they ran into a serious problem. One can only meaningfully speak of hypostases within a particular species because if beings have different sets of natural idioms one cannot single out the specific characteristics that would constitute them as hypostases. Yet Christ does not belong to a species. This leads to the inevitable conclusion that Christ is not a hypostasis. In this article I will explore how four different Chalcedonian theologians of the sixth and early seventh centuries — Leontius of Byzantium, Pamphilus, Eutychius of Constantinople and Leontius of Byzantium — approached this problem and what solutions they proposed.

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When Emperor Marcian decided to convoke a council in the city of Chalcedon he wished to put an end to half a century of controversy about the meaning of the incarnation. A new creedal formula was hammered out, in the hope that it would appeal to all factions and thus re-establish peace and unity in the imperial church. However, this hope turned out to be futile because the proposed distinction between hypostasis and nature immediately came under attack. One group of opponents, nicknamed Nestorians, insisted that in the in-
carnated Word there were two hypostases and two natures whereas the other group, referred to as Monophysites, spoke only of one hypostasis and one nature. Those who accepted the creedal formula of Chalcedon were slow to respond to these attacks. The first apologies appeared only in the first half of the sixth century. The most important of these texts is without doubt the treatise *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos* by the Palestinian monk Leontius of Byzantium who is best known for his involvement in the Origenist controversy.1 A lengthy section of this treatise deals with the Nestorian claim that the flesh should have a separate hypostasis. As is his wont Leontius first sets out the position of his adversaries and then proceeds to show why it must be rejected:

Εἰ τελεία, φασίν, ἡ τοῦ Λόγου ὑπόστασις, τελεία δὲ καὶ ἡ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὄν ἀνέλαβεν, ἀτρεπτός δὲ καὶ ο λόγος μεμένηκεν, ἀναλλοίωτως δὲ καὶ ἡ σὰρξ διασέσωσται, πῶς οὐ δύο λέγειν ὑποστάσεις εὐσεβεῖς, μηδὲ ὑποτέρας συγκεχυμένης:2

They say: “If the hypostasis of the Word is complete, and that of the human being, which he has assumed, is also complete, and if the Word remains unchanged, and the flesh is also preserved without alteration, how is it then not orthodox to speak of two hypostases, as neither of them is confused with the other?”

This is a succinct statement of the Nestorian position. Since Word and flesh are complete and distinct beings they must have hypostases of their own. Leontius starts his refutation by criticising his adversaries’ terminology. He insists that completeness refers to the set of idioms that mark out a being as belonging to a particular species and that one must therefore speak of a “complete nature” and then add the qualification “of the Word” in order to indicate that the common divine nature is concretised through a specific quality. By contrast, the phrase “hypostasis of the Word” only refers to the specific quality

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and does not consider the natural dimension at all. This is a wilful misunderstanding of the Nestorian argument where hypostasis denotes the concrete being, which is made up of natural and hypostatic idioms, a concept that is found in Chalcedonian texts as well.

Such terminological acrobatics, which are a standard feature of the Christological discourse, amount to little more than cheap point-scoring. However, this does not mean that Leontius shrinks from a proper engagement with the Nestorian position. In the remainder of the section he develops a conceptual framework that makes all talk of two hypostases within the incarnated Word appear illogical. Leontius states that hypostasis can only have two functions: it can distinguish from one another two entities of the same species; or it can unite with one another two entities belonging to two different species. According to him the Nestorians misunderstood this basic framework when they took the Word as their starting point and “conferred on the flesh the relation based on hypostasis, which distinguishes it from the Father” (πὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ Πατρὸς διακρίνουσαν σχέσιν πρὸς τὴν σάρκα διδόμεν ζητὸν ὡς ὑπόστασιν), namely “the idiom of generation” (τὸ ἰδίωμα τῆς γεννησεως). In other words, their mistake is to think that hypostases belonging to two different species can be directly distinguished from one another through hypostatic idioms. It is not difficult to see why Leontius comes to this conclusion. After all it only makes sense to speak of hypostatic idioms if their bearers belong to the same species because such idioms can only be identified through distinction from the set of natural qualities common to all members of the species. Accordingly the idioms “ingenerate” and “generate,” which distinguish the Father and the Son from one another, only make sense within the “divine species” whereas the “generation” of the Son cannot establish a hypostatic distinction over against the flesh, which has a completely different building plan.

The following paragraphs are devoted to the discussion and further elaboration of this basic argument. Leontius first defines the web of relations that links the Son and the flesh as the two parts of the

(4) See below the quotation from the treatise of Pamphilus and note 19.
(6) Ibid., p. 15.9–10.
hypostasis of Christ to each other and to other divine and human persons:

Εἴς τοίνυν σχέσεων ἡμῖν θεωρουμένων, δυεῖν μὲν τοῦ Πατρὸς πρὸς τὸν Λόγον, καὶ τοῦ Λόγου πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα δυεῖν δὲ τοῦ Λόγου πρὸς τὴν σάρκα, καὶ τῆς σαρκός πρὸς τὸν Λόγον· δυεῖν δὲ τοῦ Χριστοῦ πρὸς ἡμᾶς καὶ ἡμῶν πρὸς αὐτόν τρεῖς γίνονται καθολικά συζυγίαι. Καὶ ή μὲν πρώτη τῶν συζυγιῶν σχέσις οὕτως ἔχει ὡς η τρίτη μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς πρώτης δευτέρα ἀπὸ τῆς μέσης.7

Six relations can then be seen, two that link the Father to the Word and the Word to the Father, two that link the Word to the flesh and the flesh to the Word, and two that link Christ to us and us to him. Accordingly there are three universal sets of relations, and the first set of relations is like the one that comes third when one counts from the first one, and second when one counts from the middle one.

In a second step Leontius then illustrates his point with the human paradigm where he distinguishes between soul, body and the human compound:

Ψυχὴ μὲν γὰρ πρὸς ψυχὴν τῷ ταὐτῷ τῆς οὐσίας ἡνωμένη, τῷ διαφόρω τῆς ύποστάσεως διακέκριται τούτο ή πρώτη καὶ ή τελευταία σχέσις τῶν συζυγιῶν· ψυχὴ δὲ πρὸς τὸ αὐτῆς σῶμα τῷ μὲν ἐτεροίῳ τῆς φύσεως διακέκριται, ἦνωται δὲ τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ύποστάσεως, ἢν ἡ ἀλληλούχος ζωὴ ἀπετέλεσε· τούτο ή δευτέρα καὶ ή μέση διασῴζει σχέσις.8

A soul is united to a soul through the sameness of substance but distinguished from it through the otherness of hypostasis. This is the first and the last set of relations. A soul is distinguished from its body through the qualitative otherness of nature but united with it through the conceptual framework of hypostasis, which effects the contiguous life. This preserves the second and middle relation.

These are two quite dense statements. Leontius reiterates his previous point that the Son is distinguished from the Father through his hypostasis but linked to him through his nature and then illustrates this set of relationships with the example of the soul. Here, too, he

(7) Leontius of Byzantium, Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos, ed. DALEY, p. 15.19–16.2
(8) Ibid., p. 16.11–16.
claims that different souls are distinguished from each other through their specific characteristics but united through their common building plan so as to form a species of their own. In the case of the divine hypostases Leontius has already identified the idioms of ingenerate and generate, which distinguish the Father and the Son from one another, and in the case of the human souls we can infer from an earlier section of the treatise that Leontius has in mind virtues and vices.\(^9\)

These sets of relations are integrated into a more comprehensive framework that considers the entities Son and soul as parts of the composites Christ and human being.\(^10\) Leontius calls the relationship between Son and Father and the relationship between one soul and another “the first set of relations,” and then speaks of a “second set of relations” that links the Son to the flesh and the soul to the body, before introducing a “third set of relations” that connects the remaining parts with their consubstantial counterparts. In the case of the incarnation, Leontius states that “the first set of relations is the same as the third one,” which implies that the flesh is related to other human beings in the same way as the Son is related to the Father. The consequences of this equation are obvious. The flesh would then not only share the same building plan with other human beings but also be distinguished from them through specific idioms. Accordingly we would have to conclude that the flesh, too, has a hypostasis of its own. Significantly, however, Leontius’ does not apply this general rule to the incarnation because he links other human beings not to the flesh but to the hypostasis of Christ as the compound of flesh and Son.

The reason for this shift seems clear. Leontius did not wish to accord the flesh a hypostasis of its own because otherwise he would have conceded the case to his Nestorian adversaries. If we accept that this is Leontius’ last word on the matter we have to conclude that he has constructed a faulty argument. Two explanations are possible. Either he was carried away by his penchant for symmetry, which


\(^10\) The hypostasis of the soul is not identical with the hypostasis of the human being of which the soul is a part, just as its divine counterpart, the hypostasis of the Word, is not identical with the hypostasis of Christ. Souls as such constitute a species of their own, in the same way as divine persons do.
required him to treat Son and flesh as strictly analogous cases, and thus ended up creating an abstract pattern, which was not reconcilable with his concrete Christological beliefs; or alternatively he may have adopted an already existing conceptual framework, which he then ineptly modified so as to reconcile it with his own Christological standpoint. In the latter case one could further hypothesise that this framework had first been created by the Nestorians whom Leontius wished to refute.

This, however, is not the only possible interpretation for it could also be argued that the symmetrical framework reflects Leontius’ true convictions and that he deliberately concealed these convictions with his shift from the flesh to Christ in the Christological application. In order to test this hypothesis we need to return to the human paradigm. As I have said before Leontius conceives of souls as hypostases within a species of their own. Having made this point he explains that “this is the first and the last set of relations.” This is a rather odd statement because it gives the impression that not only souls but also bodies have already been discussed. This, however, is not the case. Leontius’ silence about the bodies is highly significant. If he had wished the reader to accept the asymmetry that he had introduced into the Christological scenario he would surely have created an analogous asymmetrical statement that links other bodies not to a particular body but rather to the human compound of which this particular body is a part. Instead he says nothing at all. Therefore the reader can only come to the conclusion that in this case the complementary scenario is indeed exactly analogous and that one human body is consubstantial with other human bodies but distinguished from them through idioms as a hypostasis.

To my mind the repetition of the same formula about the identity of the first and the third set of relations that encourages the reader to complete the symmetry and the lack of a counterpart for the orthodox Christological position in the human paradigm are part of a deliberate strategy to keep open the option of a separate hypostasis of the flesh.\(^\text{11}\) I would argue that Leontius saw no problem in according the

\(^\text{11}\) Leontius chooses words and phrases with the utmost care, which makes it inconceivable that he might have made such an egregious blunder. Cf. D. Krausmüller, “Making Sense of the Formula of Chalcedon: the Cappadocians and Aristotle in Leontius of Byzantium’s Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos,” VC, 65 (2011), pp. 484–513. My interpretation is not shared by A. Grillmeier, Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche, II.2, Die Kirche von
flesh a separate hypostasis, which distinguishes it from other human beings, because he was well aware that that flesh must have had particular characteristics, such as the shape of its nose, which differed from those of other human beings. However, this does not at all mean that he made concessions to his Nestorian adversaries. We have already seen that for Leontius hypostasis can only distinguish within a species, not between species. Therefore both Son and flesh are horizontally bounded but vertically open. This is exactly what the second set of relations indicates: after the incarnation Son and flesh are not of the same nature but nevertheless united in one hypostasis, and after conception soul and body are not of the same nature but nevertheless united in one hypostasis.

It seems likely that Leontius chose this strategy because he did not wish to offend other Chalcedonians who would have considered his conceptual framework to be too close to the Nestorian position. He may well have assumed that such people would immediately fasten on explicit statements and not bother with the intricacies of his argument. If this interpretation is correct Leontius would have written for two distinct audiences, those who could and those who could not read between the lines.

Leontius’ argument seems very neat. However, this does not mean that all problems are resolved. This becomes obvious when we turn to the next paragraph where Leontius focuses not on the parts but on the compound itself. Here the human paradigm precedes the Christological application:

‚Ανθρωπός δὲ πρὸς τὸ ἀπλῶς σῶμα καὶ τὴν ἀπλῶς ψυχὴν ὡς ὀλος πάντη τούτων (sc. τοῦ ἀπλῶς σώματος καὶ τῆς ἀπλῶς ψυχῆς) διακεκριμένος διὰ τὴν πρὸς τὰ ἑαυτοῦ μέρη πρώτην σχέσιν δευτέραν ποιεῖται πρὸς αὐτὰ (sc. τὸ ἀπλῶς σῶμα καὶ τὴν ἀπλῶς ψυχήν) κοινωνιάν. Ωστε καὶ ὁ Χριστός πρὸς ἡμᾶς

Konstantinopel im 6. Jahrhundert, Freiburg, Basel, Vienna, 1989, S. 203: “Er fragt sich kein einziges Mal, ob nicht die menschliche Natur durch die idia individualisiert sei.” However, Grillmeier’s conclusion is not based on a thorough analysis of Leontius’ argument.

(12) One such author would be John of Caesarea. Cf. GRILLMEIER, Jesus der Christus, S. 63.

(13) Interestingly he was less cautious in his later treatise Solutiones where he accepts the possibility that the flesh had a hypostasis of its own, cf. Leontius of Byzantium, Solutiones, ed. DALEY, p. 95.19–23. Cf. GRILLMEIER, Jesus der Christus, S. 203.
καὶ πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα ὡς ὅλος ὡν ἐκ μερῶν, διὰ τὰ ἑαυτοῦ μέρη μεσιτεύει τοῖς ἄκροις, ὥλως μὲν ὑπόστασις ὡν πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα διὰ τὴν θεότητα μετὰ τῆς ἁνθρωπότητος· καὶ ὑπό‐
στασις ὡν ὅλως πρὸς ἡμᾶς, μετὰ τῆς θεότητος διὰ τὴν ἁνθρω‐
πότητα.14

A human being, <when one considers its relationship> towards
the simple body and the simple soul, is completely distinguished
from them (sc. the simple body and the simple soul) as a whole
because of the first relation to its parts <but> establishes a second‐
ary communion with them (sc. the simple body and the simple
soul). Accordingly Christ, too, <when one considers his relation‐
ship> towards us and towards the Father, is a whole out of parts,
<and> mediates because of its parts with the extremes, being com‐
pletely a hypostasis towards the Father because of the divinity to‐
gether with the humanity, and being completely a hypostasis to‐
wards us because of the humanity together with the divinity.15

As before Leontius has taken care to describe two cases, Christ and
an individual human being, in very similar ways. However, the two
statements are again not entirely parallel. Leontius’ penchant for
cryptic language makes it difficult to establish their precise meaning.
Therefore I will start with the most straightforward element, the
Christological dimension. According to Leontius the other divine
persons are consubstantial with Christ’s divine part and we are con‐
substantial with Christ’s human part. Moreover, Christ as a whole
unites a human and a divine component and can thus serve as a
bridge between the two “extremes,” that is, the other divine persons
and the other human beings. As a consequence he can let other hu‐
man beings partake of his divinity and other divine persons partake
of his humanity. This is evidently quite a conventional statement
about the communication of idioms. The only innovative element is
that this communication does not only extend to the human but also
to the divine sphere.

(14) Leontius of Byzantium, Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos, ed. DAILY,
p. 16.16–17.2.

(15) Cf. the translation of the first part by C. DELL’ORSO, Cristo e Logos: il
Calcedonismo del VI secolo in Oriente (Studia Ephemerides Augustinianum, 118), Rome, 2010, p. 134: “L’uomo nel suo insieme si distingue dal corpo
stesso e dall’anima stessa semplicemente intesi per la prima relazione verso
le sue parti, per la seconda relazione fa comunione con loro.”
The Christological statement helps us to understand the anthropological paradigm, which is expressed in more abstract language. The simple souls and simple bodies, which Leontius mentions here, are the counterparts of the uncompounded other divine persons and other human beings in the Christological application. Therefore they must not be confused with the particular body and soul that are part of the human compound. Instead they have a “first relation” to the body and soul as parts of this compound through the fact that they are consubstantial with them. In a second step the human being as the whole then establishes a “second relation,” which unites the parts. As a result other simple human souls are now linked to other simple human bodies and vice versa.16 This is clearly an abstruse scenario, which only makes sense when seen as a paradigm for the incarnation. However, one should not therefore dismiss it as irrelevant because the human paradigm contains one important element that is missing in the following divine application. Leontius says that a particular human being as a whole is entirely separated from other simple human souls and other simple human bodies.17 The meaning of this statement is clear. The human being is defined as “compounded of body and soul” and therefore comparable neither with uncompounded souls nor with uncompounded bodies. The symmetry of the argument requires us to add this dimension to the Christological scenario where only the unifying aspect is made explicit.18 Here, too, we can conclude that a Christ who is defined as “compounded of divine nature and human nature” is comparable neither with the uncompounded other divine persons nor with the uncompounded other human beings.

This raises the question: how is this hypostasis then constituted? After all Leontius had earlier insisted that hypostasis distinguishes

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(16) The transmission goes from a simple soul to another soul that is part of a particular human compound, from this soul to the body that is part of the same human compound, and from that body to another simple body.

(17) Cf. DELL’ORSO, Cristo e Logos, p. 134, who recognises that the hypostasis of a human being is different from individual bodies and individual souls but does not sufficiently highlight the fact that this difference is not established within the same species.

(18) That the human paradigm is not a simple illustration but adds further important features, which must then be added to the Christological application is also argued by B. B. DALEY, ‘The Origenism of Leontius of Byzantium’, JTS, n.s., 27 (1976), pp. 333–369, esp. 350.
only individuals within a species. In the case of a particular human being this causes no problems because there are other human beings, which constitute a species that has “compounded of body and soul” as one of its main characteristics. As Leontius states in this case “we predicate the meaning of the universal and species of the particular and proper” (τὴν τοῦ καθόλου καὶ εἴδους σημασίαν κατὰ τοῦ μερικοῦ καὶ ἰδίου κατηγορούμεν). Therefore it is possible to make a distinction between this characteristic and hypostatic idioms such as differently shaped noses and to tell individuals apart from each other. By contrast, the case of Christ is highly problematic because here this overarching framework is missing. In fact, Leontius takes great care to distinguish between the particular human being and the incarnation of the Word:

Ἐπὶ δὲ Χριστοῦ τοιαύτη τις τάξις σχέσεων οὐχ εὑρίσκεται οὐ γάρ δή, εἴδους ὄντος Χριστῶν ὡσπερ καὶ ἀνθρώπων, ἐκ τούτων ὁ εἷς, ὡς ἱδίως ποιός παρὰ τὸν καθόλου καὶ κοινὸν Χριστὸν Χριστὸς αὐτὸς χρηματίζων, μία φύσις λέγεται.20

In Christ no such order of relations is found since it is not the case that there exists a species of Christs in same way as there exists one of human beings, so that one of them could be a Christ by being singled out through specific qualities from the universal and common Christ and thus be called one nature.

The consequences of this distinction are obvious. If there is no species there cannot be a hypostasis of Christ because in the absence of other Christs it is impossible to determine the ontological status of the characteristic “compounded of Son and flesh.” This remains the fact even if one attributes all other hypostatic idioms either to the Son or to the flesh as Leontius does. Consequently there is only one way of constituting the hypostasis of Christ. One will have to accept that hypostasis can be used without reference to the framework of species. In this case Christ would be a hypostasis because he is different from other non-consubstantial hypostases such as the Father or the human being Peter. If one accepts such a possibility, however, Leontius’ anti-Nestorian argument collapses because this is exactly what his adversaries had argued.

(20) Ibid., p. 18.24–27.
In his later treatise *Solutiones* Leontius did not return to this discussion because there he polemicised not against Nestorians but only against Monophysites. Nevertheless, this text contains one passage that is relevant to our topic. As before Leontius begins by stating the position of his adversaries:

Πάντα, φησὶ, τὰ μοναδικά, τὴν ὡς τινὸς φύσιν ἔχοντα, καὶ φύσις μία λέγεται, οἷον ἥλιος εἷς καὶ οὐρανὸς εἷς, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο μία φύσις ἥλιου καὶ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῶν τοιούτων.21

He says: “All singularities have the nature of something and are called one nature, as for example the sun is one and the heaven is one, and for this reason there is one nature of the sun and of the heaven and of suchlike things.”

This argument seeks to explain how Christ can be a nature despite the fact that there are no other Christs by having recourse to analogies within the created order. The Monophysites claim that entities such as the sun are not members of species but are nevertheless real and must therefore be regarded as natures.22 Unsurprisingly Leontius rejects this argument. He claims that singularities cannot exist because each concrete being is a hypostasis within an overarching species. For example, he explains that the sun is a star, which is singled out from other stars through specific characteristics such as the fact that it shines during the day.23 In this context he reiterates his previous position that creation is organised according to universal and rational principles. Each genus is divided into species through specific differences whereas each species is divided into individuals through hypostatic idioms.24 This argument looks quite attractive. However, it conceals an important fact, namely that Chalcedonians were wrestling with a very similar conceptual problem. After all, if beings can only exist in the framework of genera, species and indi-

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(22) This argument was without doubt adapted from the contemporary philosophical discourse, cf. S. Otto, *Person und Subsistenz. Die philosophische Anthropologie des Leontios von Byzanz, ein Beitrag zur spätantiken Geistesgeschichte*, München, 1968, S. 64–65, with reference to Olympiodorus’ commentary of Aristotle’s *Categories*.
(24) Ibid., p. 84.27–32.
viduals this puts paid not only to the one nature of Christ but also to the one hypostasis of Christ.

Since the recourse to singularities provided an escape route from this conceptual prison it comes as no surprise that Chalcedonian theologians of the next generation took the Monophysite argument as a starting point for their own anti-Nestorian polemic. A typical example is found in the Christological treatise of Pamphilus:

Ἀνωτέρω δὲ ταύτην εἰρηκότες δύνασθαι λέγεσθαι φύσιν ἤγουν οὐσίαν τὴν ὑπόστασιν, οὐσίαν μετὰ ἰδιωμάτων ἐσημάναμεν, και οὐκ αὐτήν τὴν πληθὺν τῶν χαρακτηριστικῶν ἰδιωμάτων μόνην, ὡσπερ ἔστιν κυρίως τῆς ὑποστάσεως σημείον, τῷ λόγῳ καὶ αὐτὰ (sc. τὰ χαρακτηριστικά ἰδιώματα) διακρίνοντες, καὶ ἣς τῷ εἴδους κατηγορουμένου κατὰ τῶν ἁτόμων. Εἴδος δὲ Χριστῶν οὐχ ὑπάρχει, ἵνα καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς κατὰ Χριστὸν ὑποστάσεως τοῦτο ἔχωμεν· πρᾶγμα γάρ ἐστι μοναδικόν, ὡσπερ καὶ ἥλιος καὶ σελήνη.25

When we said earlier that this hypostasis can also be called nature or substance we meant by this not the multitude of characteristic idioms alone, which is the principal indicator of a hypostasis, when we distinguish through mental operation those (sc. the characteristic idioms), too, from it (sc. the hypostasis), <which is possible> because the species is predicated of the individuals. However, there is no species of Christs so that we could have such a thing in the case of Christ’s hypostasis as well. For he is a singularity like the sun and the moon.

This argument must have gained widespread acceptance in Chalcedonian circles because it also appears in a treatise of Patriarch Eutychius, which has only survived in an Armenian translation that was recently translated into Italian:

Infatti, Cristo nostro Dio non è il terzo risultato, come alcuni credono insanamente, quasi come Pietro e Paolo, tanto da costituire molti cristì a ragione della sua consustanzialità. Perché la consustanzialità e (propria) di coloro che sono dello stesso genere. Ora secondo essi, la consustanzialità non converrebbe a Cristo, perché

non e possibile dividerlo in molti cristi, come avviene ai singolari, al sole e alla luna.²⁶

Pamphilus and Eutychius share the same worry, namely that Christ as the compound of Son and flesh might be regarded as a member of a species and thus share with other beings a common building plan that could be termed a nature. In order to exclude this possibility they adapt the Monophysite position by replacing the one nature of Christ with the one hypostasis of Christ, with the result that the sun and the moon are now no longer presented as singular natures but as singular hypostases. Unfortunately, this modification does not solve any of their problems. The authors do not seem to be familiar with Leontius’ argument that sun and moon belong to the same overarching species of star. Indeed, their whole argument hinges on the fact that there is no such species. Accordingly the reader will come to the conclusion sun and the moon are still at the same time also singular natures and that Pamphilus and Eutychius accept the Monophysite Christological position. Moreover, the shift to hypostasis brings with it new conceptual problems. The Monophysites could compare singularities such as the sun with normal species such as human beings and in this way establish their status as nature. Such a solution is impossible within the Chalcedonian framework because in the absence of other Christs it is impossible to distinguish specific idioms from a common building plan. Without such specific idioms, however, a hypostasis cannot exist.

There is no indication that Pamphilus or Eutychius were aware of these problems. This shows clearly how mediocre Chalcedonian theologising had become in the second half of the sixth century, in stark contrast to the Monophysite discourse, which was enriched by the contributions of John Philoponus. Indeed, one can make a case that Pamphilus and Eutychius were heavily influenced by Philoponus’ arguments.²⁷

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However, not all Chalcedonian writers dealt with the problem in such a superficial way. At this point we need to turn to Leontius of Jerusalem, a Palestinian monk who most likely lived in the first half of the seventh century. Leontius wrote a voluminous treatise *Contra Nestorianos* in which passages from a lost Nestorian treatise are quoted and then refuted. The second book of this treatise deals with Nestorian arguments against the one hypostasis of Christ. Leontius starts by offering a series of definitions of the term hypostasis, which culminates in the following passage:

> Λέγεται δὲ κυριώτερον καὶ οἰκειώτερον ἡ τοιαύτη ὑπό‐στασις, ἀτε πρὸς τῇ συντάσσει καὶ ἐκ τοῦ πάντων τῶν τε ὁμο‐ειδῶν καὶ ἐτεροειδῶν κατὰ τὸ ἰδικὸν γνωρισμός, κεχωρισμέ‐νον δεικνύειν τὸ ὑποκείμενον ἄτομον, τόδε τι καθ’ ἑαυτὴν ἀπό‐στασις τις οὖσα καὶ διορισμὸς τῶν ἀδιορίστων οὐσιῶν εἰς τὸν κατὰ πρόσωπον ἄριθμον ταύτην οἱ Πατέρες νοοῦσι τε καὶ ὀνομάζουσι.

But such a one is called more correctly and more appropriately hypostasis (*hypo-stasis*) because besides being something that constitutes (*sys‐tasis*; literally: standing together) it also shows the underlying individual as being separate from all members of the same species and all members of different species according to its specific marker (sc. and thus) as a concrete thing by itself, being something that separates (*apo‐stasis*; literally: standing apart) and that bounds the unbounded substances in order to constitute the number of each one as regards his person. Therefore, then, the Fathers, too, conceived of it and spoke of it as a person.

Response to Philoponus’ arguments Eutychius arrived at a radically new definition of species as the multiplication of originally singular hypostases.


Here Leontius argues that specific characteristics, which are found in a concrete individual, distinguish this individual not only from other individuals belonging to the same species but also from other individuals belonging to different species.\(^{31}\) This general framework is best illustrated with an example: according to it the green-eyed human being Paul would be distinguished as a separate hypostasis not only from the blue-eyed human being Peter but also from the brown-eyed dog Argus. This is in stark contrast to the argument of Leontius of Byzantium who had insisted that hypostases can only be distinguished from each other within the same species.\(^{32}\)

Of course, Leontius of Jerusalem, too, was aware that the normal function of hypostasis is ‘to distinguish individuals from those who are alike as regards nature’ (τῶν ὁμοίων κατὰ φύσιν διακρίνειν τὰ ἄτομα).\(^{33}\) In order to understand why he deviated from the existing consensus we need to consider the context. In the immediately following passage Leontius wrestles with an argument put forward by his Nestorian adversary:

"Ετι δὲ φαμεν, ὅτι καὶ ἕνος ἄνθρωπον τυχόν ἢ ἵππον ἐν τῷ παντὶ γενομένῳ μόνον, καὶ οὐδενός ὄντος αὐτῷ ὑμοσιών, οἰον Ἀδὰμ τοῦ πρωτοπλάστου, ἢ ὑπόστασις αὐτοῦ δύναται ἄν καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἐτεροοοσιῶν αὐτῷ ἢ ὑπόστασις διαγινώσκεσθαι καὶ οὐχ ἢπει οὐκ ἢ τι αὐτοῦ ὑμοσιών τῇ ὑποστάσει ἀφ’ οὐ διεκρίνετο, διὰ τούτῳ ἀνάγκη μή ἐρρόσθαι τὸν πειρὴ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ λόγον, εἰ μὴ εἰς ἄνευ ὑμοσία ἐτέρα. Τούναντιον γὰρ ὁ λόγος ἐχει ὧτι ἢν μὴ ἐστὶ ὑποστάσις τῶν ὑμοσιῶν οὐ διακρίνονται οὐχ ὃστε συνάγετε, ὡτι ἢν οὐκ ἐστὶ ὑμοσία τινα, αἱ ὑποστάσεις οὐ διορίζονται καὶ γὰρ καὶ τῶν ἐτεροοοσιῶν αἱ ὑποστάσεις, ἀλλὰ τούτων καὶ αἱ φύσεις διακρίνουσιν ὑμοσιῶν δὲ τινῶν οὐκ ὄντων, οὐδὲ χρεία τῆς ἀπὸ τῶν ὑμοσιῶν διακρίσεως. Καὶ τοῦ σφανον γοῦν εἰς, καὶ ἡ γη μια, καὶ οἰκθὴ εἰς ἐστιν καὶ οὐ διὰ τῷ μὴ εἶναι ἐτέρα τούτως ὑμοσία, εἰπο τὶς ἢν μη ἐναι οὐν τοῦτων ὑποστασιν. Ὑμοσίας δὲ καὶ κόσμος ὅτε ὁ πᾶς, καὶ οὐ τῷ μὴ εἶναι πλεῖος κόσμοις ὑμοσιών τῶν ἀνυπόστατοι εἰς αὐτοῦ ἡ σύστασις. Τὶ οὐν ψάμαν πείθει τὴν Χριστοῦ ὑπόστασιν, εἰ μή κατὰ πάντα

\(^{31}\) Cf. OTTO, Person und Subsistenz, S. 127.


\(^{33}\) Leontius of Jerusalem, Contra Nestorianos, II.1, in: PG, 86, col. 1532C11–12.
λόγων εἰς ταύτη τις ἐτέρα υπόστασις ὁμοούσιος, μηδενὶ φυσικῶ
λόγῳ τῶν ἐν αὐτῇ πλεονάζουσα ἢ ἔλλειπουσα, μηδὲ υπόστασιν
tοῦτο τοῦ ᾿κωσαιού συνθέτου ὡς τοῦ ἰδικωτάτου καταδε‐
χεσθαι;34

And we say furthermore that even if there were only one hu‐
man being, for example, or one horse in the whole world, and
nothing were consubstantial with it, as was the case with Adam
the first-fashioned, his hypostasis would also be recognised as
hypostasis through comparison with those that were of a different
substance from him. And the fact that there was no being con‐
substantial with the hypostasis from which it could be distinguished
does not necessarily mean that the definition of his hypostasis is
not valid, if there were no others that would be consubstantial
with him. For the opposite is the case, namely that those who have
no hypostasis are not distinguished from the consubstantial be‐
ings, not as you conclude, that the hypostases of those who do not
have some consubstantials, are not separated. For there are also
hypostases of non-consustantials, but in their case the natures,
too, distinguish. When there are no consubstantials for some be‐
ings, there is no need either for the distinction from those of the
same nature. And the heaven is one, and the earth is one, and the
ether is one, and nobody would say that since there are no other
beings consubstantial with them their hypostasis does not exist. In
the same way this whole world is one, and nobody would say that
since there are no further consubstantial worlds it has no reality
and hypostasis. What then persuades you not to accept a hypo‐
stasis of this life-giving composite living being, which is most pecu‐
ar even if there is not another hypostasis that is in all respects con‐
substantial, with those in it being neither more or less as regards
the natural definition?

From this passage it is evident that the author of the lost Nestor‐
ian treatise turned Leontius of Byzantium’s argument against Leontius of
Jerusalem. He claimed that a hypostasis is constituted through com‐
parison with other members of the same species because hypostatic
idioms can only be identified in juxtaposition with the common
building plan. In order to refute this argument Leontius of Jerusalem
has recourse to singularities just as Pamphilus and Eutychius had
done before him. However, unlike them he spells out the conse‐
quences of such a strategy. He still speaks as if it were possible to

34 Leontius of Jerusalem, Contra Nestorianos, II.1, in: PG, 86,
distinguish in a singularity between hypostatic idioms and natural qualities. However, he is aware that such a distinction is meaningless when applied to entities belonging to different species because without a consistent framework one is forced to compare all with all. Accordingly he concludes that in this case the natural idioms also function as hypostatic idioms because they, too, establish the existence of separate beings. As a result nature as an independent concept disappears and is subsumed in the concept of hypostasis. The advantages of such a model are immediately evident. Christ’s characteristic “being compounded of Word and flesh” has now unequivocally become a hypostatic idiom. Yet there is also a drawback, which Leontius conveniently forgets. If different sets of natural idioms establish non-consubstantial beings as discrete hypostases, then Christ’s divine and human natures should also be given this status because they are substantially different from one another.

This, however, is not Leontius of Jerusalem’s last word on the matter. In a later section of the second book he makes another attempt to solve the conceptual problems that he is forced to face. There he states:

Τῶν φύσεων τῶν τε ὣμοιῶν καὶ ἀνομοίων διακρινομένων τε καὶ ἐνομομένων οὐ λόγῳ φύσεως ἄλλ’ ἀριθμῷ, ἡγουν ὡς ἀριθμητής ἐκάστης (sc. φύσεως) ἀφ’ ἑτέρας ὥμοιας καὶ ἀνομοίων (sc. φύσεως) διωρισμένης, τὴν ἐν τοῖς οὕσι τῶν τε ἄνομοιῶν (sc. φύσεων) σύνθεσιν καὶ τῶν ὣμοιῶν (sc. φύσεων) διάκρισιν ἢ ὑπόστασις ἢ μὲν πέφυκεν ἐξαγγέλλειν, διωρισμός τὰς ὁδός κυρίως καὶ ἀπόστασις ἑτέρου τινὸς ἀφ’ ἑτέρου, κἀν τε ὣμοια ὄντα τὴν φύσιν, κἀν τε ἄνομοια εἰς καὶ διεστηκότα ταῖς φύσειν ἀλλήλων, οὐ λόγῳ πάντως, ἄλλ’ αὐτῇ τῇ ὑπάρξει.

When similar as well as dissimilar natures are distinguished as well as united, not through definition of nature but through

(35) My emendation. The Migne text reads οὐ λόγῳ ἄλλα φύσεως ἀριθμῷ. Cf. the previous quotation where Leontius uses the formula φυσικῷ λόγῳ.


number, that is, when each (sc. nature) insofar as it is countable is separated from another similar and dissimilar (sc. nature), the hypostasis is wont to announce to us the composition of the dissimilar (sc. natures) and the distinction of the similar (sc. natures), as being first and foremost a separation and distance of a certain one from another one, be they similar in nature or be they dissimilar and distant from each other as regards their natures, not at all through the definition but through the very existence.

In this passage Leontius proposes an entirely new theory about the ontological status of beings and their relations with each other. His starting point was evidently a chiastic statement, which declared that nature in the sense of definition or building plan unites members of the same species (φύσεις ὁμοίως, in the sense of individual ὀμοφυῆ or ὀμοειδῆ) and separates members of different species (φύσεις ἀνόμως, in the sense of individual ἐτεροφυῆ or ἐτεροειδῆ) whereas conversely hypostasis separates members of the same species and unites members of different species. An example of such a statement can be found in Leontius of Byzantium’s Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos. Leontius of Jerusalem has radically reinterpreted one part of this chiasm: he states that he does not wish to look at the building plans of beings but only at their number. This makes any attempt at classification impossible, a fact that Leontius emphasises by putting next to each other the complementary terms ὀμοίων/ἀνομών and διακρινόμενων/ἐνομικόν and by repeatedly using the copula τέ ... καί. As a consequence union and division become simple mathematical operations. One can either add one further item to a set of items or one can take one item away from such a set.

Here Leontius has clearly given up on trying to establish the difference between two beings through comparison of their qualities. It seems likely that in the end he considered such a model unsatisfactory because it forced him to admit the existence of ontological bonds between individual beings. Instead he introduced the concept of existence, which establishes the reality of discrete beings quite apart from their respective make-up. This shift was undoubtedly facilitated by the fact that unlike the Cappadocians, Leontius accepted the exist-

(38) Leontius of Byzantium, Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos, ed. Daley, p. 15.2–4.
ence of specific natures and considered the species or common nature as an abstraction.\textsuperscript{39}

By eliminating the qualitative dimension Leontius has managed to reduce all specific natures to singularities and thus completed the transformation of nature into hypostasis. As a consequence there is no need for hypostasis as a separate category and indeed Leontius states clearly that hypostasis is nothing more than an indicator of the fact that all consubstantial and non-consubstantial specific natures are numerically distinct from each other. At this point, however, the argument loses its coherence. Logic would require that the second half of the original chiastic statement, which refers to hypostasis, should be restructured in exactly the same way as the first half, which refers to nature. However, Leontius refrains from taking such a step. Instead he reiterates the traditional teaching that the hypostasis distinguishes consubstantial beings and unites non‐consubstantial beings. The reason for this nonsensical statement is obvious. Leontius was aware that his model precluded any union of non‐consubstantial beings that was more than an entirely superficial adding up. Such a position, however, was irreconcilable with the central Chalcedonian teaching of the one hypostasis of Christ.

The following passage gives us an idea of how Leontius tried to overcome this problem. There he insists that the Word and the flesh cannot be two hypostases because hypostases have a distinguishing function whereas the hypostasis of Christ is one.\textsuperscript{40} This can only mean that for him the one hypostasis of Christ comes before the two natures that it encompasses. Here we need to remember that Leontius defines hypostasis as mere existence, which is in no way dependent on the presence of natural or hypostatic idioms and thus should be ontologically prior to them. In order further to elucidate this conceptual framework I would like to draw attention to statements by other Chalcedonian theologians. In his treatise \textit{Ambigua} Maximus the Confessor describes the constitution of beings in the following way:


Τίνες οἱ ἑκάστῳ τῶν ὄντων τῇ ὑπάρξει πρώτως ἐγκαταβλη‐
θέντες λόγοι, καθ’ οὓς καὶ ἐστι καὶ πέφυκε τῶν ὄντων ἐκαστον
καὶ εἰδοπεποίηται;41

What are the definitions that were at the first put into the exist‐
ence of each of the beings, according to which each of the beings
has substance and nature and has been formed?

Here an individual entity seems to be constituted by first giving it
existence and then filling this existence with qualifications that estab‐
lish genera and species. Such a model could also surface in discus‐
sions of the incarnation as is evident from Leontius of Byzantium’
Contra Nestorianos and Eutychianos:

Πῶς οὖν μίαν Χριστοῦ φύσιν καλεῖς,
καὶ ταύτην σύνθετον,
τῆς Χριστοῦ προσηγορίας οὐ φύσιν ἀλλ’ ὑπόστασιν σημαινούσης
περὶ ἣν (sc. τὴν ὑπόστασιν) αἱ φύσεις ὄρωνται, καὶ ἐν αἰς (sc.
ταῖς φύσεσιν) τὸ πρόσωπον ἀφορίζεται;42

How then do you speak of one nature of Christ, and moreover
of it being composite when the appellation Christ does not denote
a nature but a hypostasis around which (sc. the hypostasis) the na‐
tures are seen and in which (sc. the natures) the person is separat‐
ed out?

Here the hypostasis is defined as the core around which two sets of
natural idioms are layered, and is at the same time clearly distin‐
guished from the one person, which is constituted by the hypostatic
idioms surrounding the two natures.43

These two statements are not more than chance remarks. Never‐
theless, they show that it was possible to conceive of a scenario where
the existence of a particular being was not the result of the coming
together of idioms but rather preceded all qualifications. In a recent
article I have made the case that starting from such ideas Leontius
developed a new interpretation of Trinitarian theology and Christol‐
ogy. According to this interpretation an empty existence turns itself
first into a divine species consisting of Father, Son and Spirit and then
in a second step adds the flesh to the Son.44 Thus it can be argued that

(42) Leontius of Byzantium, Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos, ed. DALEY,
p. 84.12–14.
Leontius had such a conceptual framework in mind when he replaced the definition of nature with number and existence.

Leontius could claim with some justification that he had successfully rebutted the Nestorian challenge. However, at this point one can ask if the formula of Chalcedon has not lost its original meaning. After all, in the new model the pre-existent one hypostasis cannot contain the two natures as bounded entities but only as aggregates of atomised idioms.\(^{(45)}\) His battle against the Nestorians would then have led Leontius into the camp of the radical Monophysites.

The discussion of passages from *Contra Nestorianos* has shown that Leontius of Jerusalem developed two theories to establish the existence of the singular hypostasis of Christ. While these theories are mutually exclusive they serve the same purpose, namely to remove all ontological bonds between discrete beings and thus to reduce nature to hypostasis. The willingness with which Leontius of Jerusalem took this step is in stark contrast to the conservatism of his predecessor Leontius of Byzantium and his younger contemporary Maximus the Confessor who insisted that individuals were located within an overarching system of genera and species.\(^{(46)}\)

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In this article I have attempted to throw further light on the as yet insufficiently understood Christological discourse of the sixth and early seventh centuries. In this discourse it was of vital importance to be able to present analogies for the incarnation within the created order. Any argument that did not meet this requirement was immediately disqualified as incoherent and irrational. Under these circumstances Chalcedonian theologians ran into serious difficulties with their teaching of the one hypostasis of Christ. According to traditional opinion hypostases existed only as members of a species because hypostatic idioms could only be identified when they could be distinguished from a common set of natural idioms. The hypostasis of Christ, however, was unique. Leontius of Byzantium had acknowledged this problem only in an oblique manner but increasing pressure from the Nestorians forced later theologians to develop a coun-


The Chalcedonian theologians considered Christ as a hypostasis which is a composite of two parts. At the same time they adapted the conceptual framework that the Cappadocians had developed for the Trinity (the beings which share a set of natural idioms are distinguished from each other through specific characteristics that accede to these idioms). Having taken these steps, however, they ran into a serious problem. One can only meaningfully speak of hypostases within a particular species because if beings have different sets of natural idioms one cannot single out the specific characteristics that would constitute them as hypostases. Yet Christ does not belong to a species. This leads to the inevitable conclusion that Christ is not a hypostasis. In this article I will explore how four different Chalcedonian theologians of the sixth and early seventh centuries — Leontius of Byzantium, Pamphilus, Eutychius of Constantinople and Leontius of Byzantium — approached this problem and what solutions they proposed.